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ABSTRACT

Formal accreditation reviews represent a significant outlay in terms of dollars and man hours for all institutions of higher education. This outlay can often be especially difficult for community colleges. In an effort to provide assistance for colleges entering the accreditation review process, a study was done of criteria that are most often cited by accreditation visiting committees. The focus of the study was on Level 1 institutions in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools that underwent reaffirmation site visits over a three-year period during the late 1990s. Results of the study suggested that ensuring proper academic credentials of faculty members is the most common problem for community colleges in the South. Other significant areas of concern include: institutional effectiveness of administrative and educational support services; institutional effectiveness of educational programs; maintaining appropriate documentation relating to faculty credentials; and demonstrating basic skills competencies of graduates of all degree programs. The survey report includes data on procedures and outcomes, with outcomes being organized into categories by state, by size, and by governance structure. (Contains 19 tables, 11 figures, and 39 references. (Author/KP)

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ABSTRACT

The Specific Criteria Cited Most Often By Visiting Committees to Level I Institutions

Van D. Miller

Mentor: Robert C. Cloud, Ed.D.

Formal accreditation reviews represent a significant outlay in terms of dollars and man-hours for all institutions of higher education. This outlay can often be especially difficult for community colleges. In an effort to provide assistance for colleges entering the accreditation review process, a study was done of criteria that are most often cited by accreditation visiting committees. The focus of the study was on Level I institutions in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools that underwent reaffirmation site visits over a three-year period during the late 1990's. Results of the study suggest that ensuring proper academic credentials of faculty members is the most common problem for community colleges in the South. Other significant areas of concern include: institutional effectiveness of administrative and educational support services; institutional effectiveness of educational programs; maintaining appropriate documentation relating to faculty credentials; and demonstrating basic skills competencies of graduates of all degree programs. The survey report includes data on procedures and outcomes, with outcomes being organized into categories by state, by size, and by governance structure.

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The Specific Criteria Cited Most Often by Visiting Committees to Level I Institutions

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Educational Administration

By

Van D. Miller

Waco, Texas

December 2000

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DEDICATION

To the four most important people in my life: my wife, Ann, and our three sons, Matthew, Joseph, and Joshua. I apologize for the countless hours of distraction and inattention as I have pursued this degree. Your love and your patience have allowed us all to reach this milestone, and I will always be grateful for each of you.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background Context of Problem

While formal accreditation reviews for Level I colleges in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) occur only once every ten years, they still represent a significant outlay in terms of dollars and man-hours for each individual institution. The time frame from formation of an institutional self-study committee to the final follow-up report often exceeds five years. With over 400 "must" statements in SACS' *Criteria for Accreditation*, colleges often have a difficult time prioritizing criteria. Prioritization is complicated further by the fact that the criteria are written to apply not only to community colleges, but to major research institutions, vocational trade schools, and proprietary schools, as well.

Statement of the Problem

All community colleges face a tremendous challenge to prepare for accreditation site visits; however, institutions suffer because few data exist to document specific criteria that historically have caused problems for colleges experiencing recent site visits.

Significance of the Problem/Study

Due to limited resources, most community colleges would benefit from a synopsis of those criteria that have caused similar institutions problems in recent site visits. This information could save time and money by allowing the institution to focus efforts on those items likely to cause problems for that type of college.

Purpose of the Study/Research

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if there were recommendations that appeared repeatedly in visiting team reports to community colleges. If, after reviewing visiting team reports for a given period, it could be determined that there was some commonality in the recommendations being given, institutions would be in a better position to focus on these areas prior to an accreditation team visit.

Limitations

Visiting committee reports are private documents. Access can only be provided with the written consent of the institution. This limitation has created less than 100% participation on the part of the eligible institutions. The two colleges that declined participation are small, private colleges in Mississippi. As a result, the summaries that have been most affected by non-participation are the data for the smallest institutions, the private colleges, and the state of Mississippi. The data for private colleges have been especially affected, since the original sample included only six private institutions throughout the jurisdiction of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Due to the ten-year cycle of accreditation renewal, one would expect three years of reports to result in approximately 30% of the overall Level I membership in the Commission on Colleges. In this particular case, the three-year sample chosen represents only 22% (67 out of 307) of the overall Level I membership.

During the period from 1996 to 1999, minor revisions did occur in the criteria used by SACS in the site-visit process. Some criteria were added; some deleted; others altered.

Definition of Terms

Commission on Colleges – one of three commissions under the umbrella of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The Commission on Colleges is responsible for developing standards for and the accreditation of postsecondary degree-granting institutions in eleven southern states and in Latin America. The other commissions within SACS are the Commission on Elementary and Middle Schools and the Commission on Secondary and Middle Schools.

Criteria for Accreditation – a publication of SACS containing imperatives that institutions are required to meet in order to achieve or maintain accredited status. These imperatives are often referred to as "must" statements. Failure to satisfy a "must" statement results in an institution's receiving a recommendation from a SACS visiting committee. Institutions must satisfactorily respond to each recommendation before accreditation can be reaffirmed.

Institutional accreditation – a process by which an institution of post-secondary education evaluates its educational activities, in whole or in part, and seeks an independent judgment to confirm that it substantially achieves its objectives and is generally equal in quality to comparable institutions. Institutional accreditation of U.S. colleges and universities is granted by one of six regional accrediting agencies.

Level I institutions – Within regional accrediting agencies, colleges are classified according to the highest level of degree offered. Level I institutions offer two-year associate degrees as the highest level of degree offered. As a result, Level I institutions include institutions typically referred to as vocational schools, junior colleges and community colleges. Other levels include:

Level II – institutions offering Baccalaureate degrees;

Level III – institutions offering Master's degrees;

Level IV – institutions offering Master's and Specialist degrees;

Level V – institutions offering Doctoral degrees in three or fewer major academic or professional disciplines;

Level VI – institutions offering Doctoral degrees in four or more major academic or professional disciplines.

Proprietary school – The Texas Education Code defines a proprietary school as "any business enterprise operated for a profit, or on a nonprofit basis, … that offers or maintains a course or courses of instruction or study … through classroom instruction or by correspondence, or both, to persons for the purpose of training or preparing the persons for a field of endeavor in a business, trade, technical, or industrial occupation, or for avocational or personal improvement." (Texas Education Agency, p. 601) Proprietary schools may apply for membership in one of the six regional accrediting associations if they have state approval as 'degree-granting' institutions. Most proprietary schools, however, are not 'degree-granting,' so they traditionally seek membership from other accrediting bodies, such as the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS), Accrediting Commission of the Council on Occupational Education (COE), and/or the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT).

Self-study – a comprehensive, internal effort to assess the effectiveness of an institution or program in light of its own publicly stated objectives. The self-study is considered by some to be the keystone of the accreditation process.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools – one of six recognized regional accrediting bodies in the United States. The Southern Association, often referred to as SACS, includes institutions of higher education that award associate, baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degrees in Latin America and the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Specialized accreditation – a process by which a specialized accrediting body focuses its attention on a particular program within an institution of higher education. The close relationship of the specialized accrediting body with the professional association for the field helps insure that the requirements for accreditation are related to the current requirements for professional practice (Northeast Association of Schools and Colleges, 2000).

Research Question

The research question was: "Which specific criteria are cited most often by visiting committees to Level I institutions by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools?"

Summary

Although site visits are time-consuming and costly, they are a necessary component of the institutional accreditation process in American Higher Education. It is hoped that the research contained in this report can contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the accreditation process and also serve as a valuable resource for community colleges entering the preparatory stages of an accreditation site visit.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Summary of Problem and Purpose

The American system of accreditation of higher education institutions is a subject of considerable controversy. Professionals on both sides of the argument, however, agree that regional accreditation is a costly, time-consuming process for all institutions involved. The purpose of this research is to provide Southern community colleges potentially valuable information regarding recent findings of SACS site visit teams. The hope is that colleges beginning the self-study process can focus their efforts on areas that have been recognized as problems at similar institutions in recent years.

Preview of the Organization of the Literature Review

The literature review has been organized into four distinct sections with each section being more narrow in focus than the preceding section:

1. The review beings with an historical look at accreditation in the United States during the 20th century. This section looks closely at the unique system of regional accrediting agencies in the U.S.

2. The review continues with the somewhat generic topic of accreditation – its definition and an explanation of the different types of accreditation used in higher education today.

3. This is followed by an analysis of some of the recent problems in accreditation – at both the national and regional levels.

4. Finally, the focus is specifically on community colleges and the problems confronting these types of institutions.

Systematic Review of the Literature

History of Accreditation in the U.S./Regional Accreditation

Institutional accreditation in the United States began in 1905 when the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools first began accrediting high schools (Young, 1983b). By 1909, standards had been drawn up to accredit member colleges and universities. Although accrediting practices began in 1910, the first list of accredited post-secondary institutions did not appear until 1913.

Although colleges were involved in the creation of the accreditation system, the impetus for the system actually came from secondary schools (Harcleroad, 1976). Secondary schools were concerned about articulation issues with colleges and universities. The desire of the secondary schools to improve articulation between themselves and the colleges and universities was actually the genesis of voluntary accreditation as it is known today.

While the birth date of accreditation in higher education is considered to be 1913 with the creation of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, it took almost four decades for the concept of regional accreditation to spread across the entire United States (Young & Chambers, 1980). What has developed over the years is a unique system of six regional accrediting bodies covering many secondary schools and the vast majority of all colleges and universities. The six regional accrediting agencies, along with the location of their headquarters, are listed below:

1. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (Philadelphia, PA)
2. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (Winchester, MA)
3. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (Chicago, IL)

4. Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (Seattle, WA)
5. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Decatur, GA)
6. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (Oakland, CA)

The regional association provides the basic framework for the accreditation process (Young, 1983a). In most cases, the regional association is a legal entity that serves as the parent body for separate accrediting commissions. While one or two commissions are concerned with postsecondary education, other commissions deal with elementary education, secondary education, or some other aspect of accreditation.

According to Prairie (1994), the independence of accrediting agencies is derived from the fact that the government "recognizes, rather than regulates, the accrediting process" (p. 66). It is true that, historically, the government has left the process of reviewing the quality of college programs to the accrediting associations. Most state governments accept accreditation as evidence of sufficient quality to qualify an institution for state licensure. The federal government, in turn, recognizes state licensure and accreditation as preconditions of eligibility for federal funds (Trivett, 1976).

Regional accrediting associations saw a rapid growth in the post-World War II era. Much of this growth can be traced to the belief among many that an active, respected, voluntary third party is the strongest protection that a college or university might have against government intrusion (Harcleroad, 1983). To this day, many involved in higher education staunchly adhere to this philosophy.

The formal structures of the regional accrediting associations are the result of historical tradition rather than planned development. The different regional associations have varying numbers of full-time employees. The size of the staff has an impact on the

associations' methods of conducting business. For example, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is considered to be a field-oriented office. In the South, a commission staff member accompanies each accreditation team during the on-site evaluation. The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS), however, does not include staff members on site visits (Bemis, 1983).

Despite the differences in policy and procedure among the regional associations, and quite possibly because of these differences, the regional associations have a long tradition of cooperation among the organizations. Four particular entities have been created over the years to facilitate cooperation and communication among these associations. The first three included (Bemis, 1983):

1951 – National Commission of Regional Accrediting Agencies (NCRAA)

1964 – Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education (FRACHE)

1975 – Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA)

A fourth entity, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), was established in 1996 (Glidden, 1996).

While each specific agency maintains its unique characteristics, all regional accrediting bodies strive toward similar goals. The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA, 1981) has identified six major goals that all accrediting bodies recognize:

1. To foster excellence in postsecondary education through the development of criteria and guidelines for assessing educational effectiveness;
2. To encourage improvement of institutions and programs through continuous self-study and planning;

3. To assure other organizations and agencies, the education community, and the general public that an institution or a particular program has both clearly defined and appropriate objectives, maintains conditions under which their achievement can reasonably be expected, appears in fact to be accomplishing them substantially, and can be expected to continue to do so;

4. To provide counsel and assistance to established and developing institutions and programs;

5. To encourage the diversity of American postsecondary education and allow institutions to achieve their particular objectives and goals; and

6. To endeavor to protect institutions against encroachments that might jeopardize their educational effectiveness or academic freedom.

The American system of regional accrediting bodies is unique in the world of higher education. Most European countries have a strong, centralized management of public colleges and universities. For example, in France the National Evaluation Council (CNE) monitors institutions of higher education, helps institutions assert themselves, and eliminates contradictions between centralized management and university autonomy. In the United Kingdom, the Council for Academic Standards is responsible for the quality of education. The Council plays the role of an accrediting institution, is strongly oriented toward inspection, and has the authority to close institutions and course programs. The Netherlands has created the Inspectorate for Higher Education within the Ministry of Education. The Inspectorate combines with peer examiners and self-evaluation from the institutions to evaluate the quality of higher education (Sterian, 1992).

Robert Glidden (1998) says that the governmental, voluntary system of quality assurance exemplified by the U.S. system of regional accreditation is the direct result of our nation's founding fathers. Our forefathers specifically rejected the notion of a federal education system. These statesmen respected choice and, according to Glidden, "they

recognized the importance in an ideal democratic society that the intelligentsia not be controlled by the government" (Glidden, 1998, p. 2).

Accreditation – Definition/Different Types of Accreditation

Accreditation has been defined by one expert as being "a process by which an institution of post-secondary education evaluates its educational activities, in whole or in part, and seeks an independent judgment to confirm that it substantially achieves its objectives and is generally equal in quality to comparable institutions or specialized units" (Young, 1983a, p. 21). While most experts define the term in similar fashion, it should be noted that accreditation applies only to institutions or programs. It is important that accreditation be distinguished from certification and licensure which apply only to individuals (NEASC, 2000).

Most definitions of accreditation center on the need or desire to determine the existence of educational quality in an institution of higher education. According to Troutt (1981), accreditation is essentially an examination of the structure and internal processes of an institution as a way to ascertain the existence of educational quality. Accreditation is further able to demonstrate educational quality by assuring that "an institution has clearly defined and appropriate educational objectives, has established conditions under which the achievement of educational objectives can reasonably be expected, appears in fact to be accomplishing them substantially, and is organized, staffed and supported so that it can be expected to continue to do so" (Young & Chambers, 1980, p. 91).

Harcleroad (1980) has outlined nine distinct functions of accreditation. These functions are:

1. certifying that an institution has met established standards,

2. assisting prospective students in identifying acceptable situations,
3. assisting institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits,
4. helping to identify institutions and programs for the investment of public and private funds,
5. protecting an institution against harmful internal and external pressures,
6. creating goals for self-improvement of weaker programs and stimulating a general raising of standards among educational institutions,
7. involving the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning,
8. establishing criteria for professional certification, licensure, and for upgrading courses offering such preparations, and
9. providing one of several considerations used as a basis for determining eligibility for federal assistance.

According to Millard (1983), there are four major components to be found in accreditation. These four components are each present in the institutional accreditation process that takes place among the colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

1. The institution or program develops an adequate statement of institutional or program mission, goals and objectives.
2. The institution or program conducts an effective analytic self-study focused on the way and the extent to which it achieves its objectives.
3. A selected group of peers carries out an on-site visit to evaluate the adequacy and accuracy of the self-study and the institution's effectiveness in meeting its objectives.
4. An independent accrediting commission reviews the self-study and the report of the site visitors and decides, in view of its standards, whether the institution or program is worthy of accreditation.

Central to the determination of educational quality is the judgment of competent experts. Young & Chambers (1980) say that accreditation means that certain accepted

standards have been satisfactorily met, as judged by some group of competent experts. That group of competent experts is typically made up of peers from similar institutions of higher education. Young (1983a) points out that educational quality is defined and interpreted within the context of the institution or program's own statement of scope and purpose as compared with similar institutions and programs.

Young (1983b) has identified four basic characteristics of accreditation. These characteristics provide a concise synopsis of the accreditation process. While some experts see these characteristics as strengths of the accreditation process, others see them as weaknesses. This debate will be discussed in greater detail at a later point in this review.

1. A prevailing sense of voluntarism. The entire accreditation process is considered voluntary. Colleges are not mandated by law to be accredited; therefore, institutions have the freedom to choose to participate in the accreditation process.

2. A strong tradition of self-regulation. The regulations that accredited colleges follow are created and enforced by the institutions themselves. Accreditation standards are not mandated by the government or any other external agency.

3. A reliance on evaluation techniques. Recognized evaluation techniques are utilized by accrediting bodies in order to limit the subjective aspects of institutional review.

4. A primary concern with quality. As previously mentioned, educational quality is the central focus of the accreditation process.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (1998) recognizes three basic dimensions to the traditional accreditation process. These three dimensions are the setting of standards, the institutional self-study, and peer evaluation.

Standards are determined by both the accrediting body and the institution itself. While general parameters of standards are prescribed by the accrediting body, the college or university is granted latitude to critique itself internally based upon the unique mission

of the institution. The accrediting standards used by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) are contained in a handbook entitle *Criteria for Accreditation.* These standards have been created, periodically reviewed and revised by the College Delegate Assembly of the Commission on College. This deliberative body is made up of representatives from member institutions within the Commission. According to SACS, "this document provides consistent guidelines for peer review, representing the collective judgment of the membership on standards appropriate for the assurance of quality in higher education" (SACS, 2000, p. 1).

The second dimension of accreditation identified by the CHEA is the institutional self-study. The self-study is "a comprehensive, internal effort to assess the effectiveness of an institution or program in light of its own publicly stated objectives" (Young, 1983a, p. 25). The institutional self-study is considered by many to be the keystone of the accreditation process. Tritschler (1981) describes it as "the centerpiece in a process of accreditation that works to improve education as well as validate it" (p. 25).

Despite the fact that self-studies are typically mandated as a part of the regional accreditation process, Kells (1983) identifies several purposes the self-study can serve in enhancing the life of the institution:

1. helping institutions and programs to improve;
2. providing the foundation for all planning;
3. leading to ongoing institutional research and self-analysis;
4. stimulating review of policies, practices, procedures, and records;
5. enhancing institutional openness; and
6. providing staff development.

According to Mayhew, Ford, and Hubbard (1990), colleges typically utilize one of three different types of self-study. These types include:

1. A comprehensive self-study consisting of an historical overview of recent developments in the institution's history. Basically, this is an overall status report and represents the most common type of self-study.

2. A general overall description of the institution typically accompanied by a much more detailed analysis of one or more important elements with which the institution is particularly concerned. This type of self-study is typically utilized by large institutions.

3. A comprehensive study of all important elements of an institution. This type of self-study is quite rare due to the tremendous number of man-hours necessary to implement such a study.

Most colleges in the Commission on Colleges of SACS rely on the comprehensive self-study. Some institutions, however, seek permission to prepare an "alternative" self-study. The alternate process is representative of the second type of self-study listed above by Mayhew, Ford, and Hubbard. Colleges must receive special permission from the Commission on Colleges in order to proceed with this type of self-study. It is most often utilized by institutions with a good track record of compliance with accreditation standards. While several Level I institutions have utilized this alternative method in recent years, it is more commonly used by research universities.

The self-study process typically involves all sectors of a college campus. Faculty, administrators, staff, students, and trustees serve on committees which study all aspects of the institution. These committees will report their findings and frequently offer advice on improvement. The end result of these efforts is a self-study document that evaluates the institution's effectiveness in reaching its stated goals and its compliance with the *Criteria*.

The third and final dimension of the accreditation process is peer evaluation. Expert judgment from outside the institution is typically provided by professional educators. These educators consist of administrators and faculty members from similar types of institutions. Other members of the accreditation committee may be specialists according to the nature of the institution or program being evaluated. Finally, there may be other committee participants representing specific public interests (Young, 1983a).

Peer evaluation occurs at the culmination of the self-study. The Commission on Colleges sends a visiting committee of professional peers to the campus to assess the educational weaknesses and strengths of the institution. A written report from the visiting committee is provided to help the institution improve its programs and also to provide a basis for the Commission to decide to grant, continue, reaffirm or withdraw accreditation.

Many experts have written about what accreditation "is." Young (1983a) provides important insight into the accreditation process by stating what accreditation "is not." Accreditation is *not*:

1. Governmental – Although federal and state agencies use it to determine eligibility for certain government programs and in relation to professional licensing, the government does not control accreditation.

2. Mandatory – Although there are strong social and political pressures and even some legal prods to encourage participation, institutions are not mandated to participate in the accreditation process.

3. A rating system – Although some institutions and programs do get compared based upon accreditation results, the process is not designed to be used as a rating system.

4. A mechanism for formally policing institutional behavior.

5. A stamp of approval on individual students or courses.

For the purposes of this report, it is important to recognize two main branches of accreditation. Accreditation can be divided into *specialized accreditation* and *institutional accreditation* (Young, 1983b). Specialized accreditation in higher education typically refers to accreditation for an individual program. For example, a nursing program may receive accredited status from the National League for Nursing (NLN). A music program may be accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). Specialized accrediting bodies are typically found accrediting programs of study such as business, medicine, medical technology, nursing, theology, teacher education, and engineering.

Post-secondary institutions often have several individual programs that have been accredited by specialized accrediting agencies. Specialized accreditation facilitates program excellence by application of specific accreditation requirements to measure characteristics of a program and by making judgments about the overall quality of the program (Northeast Association of Schools and Colleges, 2000).

In addition to specialized accrediting for individual programs, most institutions will have general institutional accreditation from one of the six regional accrediting bodies that currently exist in the United States. This accreditation covers all programs and all aspects of the institution. While the differences between institutional and specialized accreditation are significant, it should be noted that the two types of accreditation are complementary. Institutional accreditation is concerned with the evaluation of the institution as a whole and does not seek to deal with any program in great detail, although programs are reviewed as a part of the consideration of the entire institution. Specialized accreditation does not seek to deal significantly with the general

conditions of the institution, although certain general conditions are considered in the context in which the accredited program is offered (Northeast Association of Schools and Colleges, 2000).

The Northeast Association of Schools and Colleges (2000) has identified several constituencies that receive value from both institutional and specialized accreditation. The constituencies include (a) the public, (b) students, (c) institutions of higher education, and (d) the professions.

Accreditation provides assurance to the public that there is conformity to general expectations in higher education or the professional field. The process also helps to identify institutions and programs that have voluntarily undertaken explicit activities directed at improving the quality of the institution and its professional programs and are carrying them out successfully. Finally, accreditation decreases the need for external intervention by public agencies in the operations of colleges and universities, since such institutions are providing internally for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality through the accreditation process.

Accreditation provides assurance to students that the educational activities of an accredited institution or program have been found to be satisfactory and, therefore, meet the needs of students. It also provides assistance in the transfer of credits among institutions, or in the admission of students to advanced degrees through the general acceptance of credits among accredited institutions – when the performance of the student has been satisfactory, and the credits to be transferred are appropriate to the receiving institution. Finally, accreditation often acts as a prerequisite for students choosing to enter a profession.

Accreditation also provides institutions of higher education a stimulus for self-evaluation and self-directed institutional and program improvement. The institutional and program self-evaluation integral to the accreditation process can strengthen the institution by the review and counsel provided through the accrediting body. Accreditation typically enhances the reputation of an accredited institution or program because of public regard for accreditation. Finally, accreditation provides one means by which an institution can gain eligibility for the participation of itself and its students in certain programs of governmental aid to postsecondary education. The recognition is also usually relied upon by private foundations as a highly desirable indicator of institutional and program quality.

Accreditation enhances the professions by providing a means for the participation of practitioners in setting the requirements for preparation to enter the professions. The process also contributes to the unity of the professions by bringing together practitioners, teachers, and students in an activity directed at improving professional preparation and practice.

For purposes of this report, unless otherwise stated, accreditation will refer to institutional accreditation.

Problems in National and Regional Accreditation

Accreditation of higher education in the United States has been a controversial process from its inception in the early 1900's. While the topics of debate have changed through the years, accreditation has had no shortage of controversy primarily due to the voluntary nature of participation in the accreditation process. Several aspects of this debate are prominently discussed in the literature.

Government intervention. Although accreditation in the U.S. is not a function of any governmental body, the government has played a role in the accrediting process for years. The federal government has been involved since 1952. That was the year that the government began using accreditation as a proxy for eligibility in federal student aid programs (Prairie, 1994).

In recent decades, tension has been growing between America's colleges and universities and government. Much of the tension has come from the fact that accreditation is essentially a process of self-evaluation. As more and more public funds have flowed into public institutions of higher education, taxpayers have become increasingly uncomfortable with self-regulation on the part of those institutions receiving the public funds. According to Marcus, Leone, and Goldberg (1983), there has been an "increasing sense among many, including state higher education coordinating agencies, that institutional quality is no longer guaranteed by voluntary accreditation and that an enhanced state role is required to ensure excellence" (p. 6). The authors continue to say that anxiety has been heightened as state agencies have expanded their focus from fiscal accountability to include assessment of educational outcomes as well. In addition to fiscal responsibility, educational accountability also seeks to ensure the quality of academic offerings.

Many in the higher education community feel strongly that governmental intervention in the accreditation process would be harmful to America's colleges and universities. According to Lindeman (1974), "educators fear that accountability to governmental bodies would result in the loss of institutional autonomy and academic freedom" (p. 175). He acknowledges that academic professionals are concerned that

control of the institutions of higher education would shift to outsiders with little knowledge of the mission, goals, and process of higher education.

Many educators feel that autonomy and academic freedom provided by voluntary accreditation have played a great role in making the American system of higher education the envy of countries around the world. The Northeast Association of Colleges and Schools (2000) states that "the record of accomplishment and outstanding success in the education of Americans can be traced in large part to the reluctance of the United States to impose governmental restrictions on institutions of postsecondary education, and to the success of the voluntary American system of accreditation in promoting quality without inhibiting innovation" (p. 1).

Harcleroad (1983) attempts to reassure the public by stating: "accreditation, with its several thousand constituent organizations and educational institutions, provides a form of self-regulation on which the entire society can rely, if its purposes, potentials, and limitations are understood and accepted" (p. 53).

Misconceptions. It is important to pay particular attention to the qualifier at the end of Harcleroad's (1983) statement: "*if* [emphasis added] the purposes, potentials, and limitations are understood and accepted." The next area of concern in the accreditation process to be addressed is the misperception on the part of the public and the institutions of higher education themselves regarding the system of accreditation.

According to Young (1983b), accreditation "has never been well understood – not by the general public or, for that matter, by the institutions of post-secondary education it primarily serves" (p. 15). He explains that, like any dynamic process, accreditation is an evolutionary process. It has been evolving "in subtle but important ways over the years

and the professionals and volunteers who have been actively involved in accreditation have been so busy making the process work that they have had little or no time to spend educating others about its value, limitations, and changing emphases" (Young, 1983b, p. 15). As a result, much of the criticism of accreditation has come from misunderstandings about the proper role of the accreditation process.

Bender (1983) states that the public has a perception that accreditation is a quality control mechanism. The public typically sees accreditation as being an externally imposed control system rather than an internal process of self-assessment. Instead, he points out, accreditation is a quality enhancement process. It represents "an approach that calls on each institution to strive for self-improvement" (Bender, 1983, p. 84).

The misperceptions of accreditation are not limited to the general public. Many in higher education fail to grasp the importance and relevance of the accreditation process. Bender (1983) acknowledges two extreme views that serve to illustrate the problem. Many prestigious institutions accept as a given that a visiting team from an accrediting association will almost automatically reaffirm their accreditation. These institutions view accreditation as "a threshold process that establishes baseline standards on which other, lesser institutions should be evaluated and accredited" (Bender, 1983, p. 82). At the other end of the spectrum are institutions that view accreditation as threatening rather than helpful. For these schools, accreditation is "a way to prove their worth" (Bender, 1983, p. 82). These schools are fearful they may not pass the test. They want to put their best foot forward and often try to cover up or explain away any possible blemishes that are uncovered.

Kells (1981) acknowledges the attempts of regional accrediting bodies to promote self-regulation and self-improvement by the institutions. But he feels their message is often misunderstood because of anxiety associated with the site visit process. He accuses many institutions of being reluctant to participate in the self-study process with the result of that reluctance being a "mechanical, poorly led, multi-committee venture. The process too often seems to have been organized to write the report rather than to study the institution" (Kells, 1981, p. 17)

Bender (1983) finds additional evidence of misperceptions in the responses of faculty members and administrators to the following question: "When does accreditation take place?" He says the vast majority of respondents will say every five or ten years. This is further proof that many in higher education fail to see accreditation as a continuous process of self-evaluation and self-improvement. Instead, it is seen as "a series of widely spaced visits by representatives of an external body for which hectic preparations must be made" (Bender, 1983, p. 83).

The importance these misperceptions play in the role of accreditation cannot be overemphasized. Experts feel the future of voluntary accreditation may hinge on the ability of education professionals to eliminate these misperceptions in the minds of the public and the higher education community itself. Semrow (1977) concludes that voluntary accreditation's future role will depend "on the extent to which it is able to maintain order in its own house and retain the confidence and support of the community of institutions and the public in general, including government agencies which are responsible to the body politic" (p. 2).

Due process. Due process protection concerns often center on the peculiar role of governmental involvement in the accreditation process. As mentioned previously, the government does not regulate the accrediting process; it simply recognizes the process. Many educational officials, however, feel the distinction between "regulation" and "recognition" is irrelevant. Prairie (1994) states that the federal government has used accreditation as a proxy for eligibility in federal student aid programs since 1952. The government's control of student financial aid requirements makes accreditation a virtual necessity for all institutions of higher education. Accreditation is required for schools to award federal financial aid; financial aid is a necessity for most schools to remain solvent. In essence, accreditation is required for institutional survival. The argument is, therefore, made that the government regulates institutions indirectly through the current accreditation process.

There has been considerable debate in recent years over the rights of member institutions in regional accrediting bodies to due process guarantees under the U.S. Constitution. Due process concerns arise primarily with regard to schools receiving sanctions from accrediting authorities. According to Prairie (1994), regional accrediting agencies have vastly different procedural safeguards regarding the disclosure of communications received by the accrediting agency or the evaluation team to the general public. The Southern Association is generally considered to be more restrictive in its disclosure policies than other regional accrediting agencies. Still, many college officials facing public sanctions agree with Prairie (1994): their institutions' rights to due process are being ignored by the public declaration of penalties prior to completion of the appeals process. This problem is further compounded by the fact that, in some regions,

accrediting associations announce public sanctions without providing the full content of the evaluation team's recommendations to the institution (Prairie, 1994).

While regional associations may differ in their treatment of adverse decisions, most parties agree that some degree of confidentiality is important in the accreditation process. If institutions are to be open with evaluation team members, the schools need to know that discretion will be exercised with the team's results (Bemis, 1983).

There are others, however, that call for greater disclosure on the part of accrediting associations. These criticisms often come from consumer advocates' calling for improved accountability and informed student choice (Young & Chambers, 1980). To date, accrediting associations and institutions have succeeded in resisting court subpoenas calling for disclosure of files about particular institutions. This success is due, in part, to the ability of accrediting association attorneys to convince the courts that the relationship between association and institution is a private relationship of the client type (Young & Chambers, 1980).

Technology and Distance Education. Many experts are calling for changes in the way the higher education community approaches accreditation. One of these experts is Peter Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. According to Ewell (1998), accreditation *must* be different due to underlying environmental pressures in higher education. These pressures are coming from the rapid inclusion of technology and distance education in the higher education community.

While Judith Eaton of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation identifies six core academic values that sustain regional accreditation, she warns that each of these

values are challenged by the ongoing proliferation of distance learning activities (Eaton, 2000). The six core academic values are listed below:

- Institutional autonomy. Distance learning challenges institutional autonomy by encouraging institutional groupings that require individual institutions to emphasize their similarity to others rather than their uniqueness. Eaton (2000) states, "technology trumps institutional and other boundaries of all kinds, including state, regional, and national borders" (p. 4).
- Collegiality and shared governance. The traditional college has relied on a decision-making style that stresses participation and consultation among administrators, faculty, students, and staff. Distance learning results in a dispersion of faculty, students, and administrators over a wide area making direct interpersonal contact more difficult, in some cases impossible.
- Intellectual authority of faculty. While faculty has traditionally exercised strict control over curriculum and academic standards, distance learning is changing this by reliance on commercial courseware, standardized courses, and online examinations.
- The degree. Higher education has traditionally organized the educational experience around the degree – two-year (associate degree), four-year (baccalaureate), and graduate (master's and doctoral) levels. Distance learning increases competition from other forms of credentialing, such as certificates of training. It also introduces entrepreneurial new degree providers that operate outside the bounds of traditional higher education.

- General education. General education requirements have always been part of traditional college degrees. The prevailing sentiment has been that college is more than education for work. Distance education is contributing to an overall trend in education toward training and episodic learning. Distance education did not start this trend, but it is helping the trend to become more pervasive.
- Site-based education. Distance learning is moving the learning environment out of the lecture halls and classrooms into the World Wide Web and telephone lines.

Lack of Focus on Educational Quality. Critics of the accreditation process point out that accreditation standards assume that judgments about institutional quality rest on inferences from certain conditions rather than direct assessment of student achievement. Regional accrediting associations defend this indirect approach to assuring quality on the grounds that a direct assessment of student performance would infringe on institutional autonomy (Troutt, 1981).

According to Troutt (1981), a review of the published standards or evaluative criteria of the six regional accrediting associations reveals eight areas of institutional operation assessed by all accrediting associations. These areas are:

1. Institutional purposes and objectives,
2. Organization and administration,
3. Financial resources,
4. Physical resources,
5. Library/Learning center,
6. Student services,

7. Faculty, and
8. Educational program.

The traditional regional accreditation approach to assessing institutional performance tended to focus on structure and process. Checking for the presence and adequacy of the institutional structures listed above supposedly provided adequate assurance of educational quality. Critics, however, argue that regional accrediting associations have failed to demonstrate that any relationship exists between regional accreditation standards and educational quality.

Young and Chambers (1980) concur that the current accreditation process must focus much more than it has on educational outcomes. These authors refer to a study entitled "The Project to Develop Evaluative Criteria and Procedures for Accreditation of Nontraditional Education." This study found that the only way to evaluate a great variety of educational forms and structures is to emphasize the *results* of the educational process rather than the process itself or its structure or sponsor.

Millard (1983) states that "consideration of process without concern for results clearly provides little if any basis for evaluating the process itself" (p. 25). Results, in his mind, are critically important to assessment of quality. Intended and unintended outcomes are what education is all about.

Once again, Troutt (1981) calls for a more direct approach to assessing institutional performance. He proposes that the focus be placed directly upon student performance. Instead of placing blame on regional accrediting standards, however, Troutt believes the deficiencies of current standards are merely representative of the shortcomings of higher education. For example, graduation requirements represent time

served, not necessarily attainments earned. "Current regional accreditation standards support a time-served approach to degree requirements and assume graduate quality can be inferred from the character of experiences a student receives" (Troutt, 1981, p. 57).

Simmons (1993) praises the efforts of community colleges as leaders in the assessment movement in higher education. The community college sector "embraces assessment at a time when the meanings of words like 'excellence,' 'quality,' and 'effectiveness' were still being debated at all levels of higher education" (Simmons, 1988, p. 1). He feels that much of what community colleges are doing today in terms of assessing institutional effectiveness and student outcomes is consistent with and complementary to accrediting agencies' goals of promoting educational quality and excellence (Simmons, 1993).

While most experts agree that institutional or specialized accreditation cannot guarantee the quality of individual graduates or of individual courses within an institution or program, many feel that the accreditation process can give reasonable assurance of the context and quality of the education offered (Northeast Association of Colleges and Schools, 2000).

Accreditation Problems Facing Community Colleges

In 1993, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges initiated a comprehensive evaluation of the standards and procedures it uses to accredit colleges (Beno, 1994). The survey included members of visiting teams as well as staff members from colleges that had been accredited between 1990 and 1993. The results of this study found that both team members and college staff members gave strongly positive evaluations of most features

of accreditation. The areas of operation and management with the most perceived benefit from accreditation were: (a) promoting self-evaluation, (b) stimulating planning and program review, (c) clarifying college mission and goals, and (d) monitoring colleges' processes. Areas of concern for the usefulness of accreditation results were: (a) improving the complex budgetary, staffing, and leadership areas of community colleges' management and (b) the ways in which boards of trustees function.

Other research addresses accreditation problems that are in many ways unique to community colleges. Two perceived areas of concern are the unique needs of community colleges and the cost effectiveness of accreditation.

Unique Needs of Community Colleges. Simmons (1993) has identified eight specific ways that regional accrediting bodies influence community college curricula. While these criteria affect all institutions of higher learning, the author claims these areas have a disproportionately greater impact on community colleges when compared to other institutions of higher learning:

- Missions and goals. Community colleges have unique missions and goals that are quite different from the typical four-year universities. These unique missions and goals are typically the result of the comprehensive nature in which community colleges attempt to meet the diverse needs of the local community.
- Program review. While all institutions of higher education face changing program requirements from state education agencies, as well as accrediting agencies, community colleges have another level of program review with local advisory boards. These advisory boards consist of members of the local business

community and represent a unique effort on the part of community colleges to quickly respond to changing needs in the local community.

- General education versus specialty requirements. General education requirements can be a particularly onerous concern for community colleges. Simmons (1993) identifies three main reasons why the general education requirements embedded in the criteria and standards of regional accrediting commissions are often a challenge for community colleges: (a) Time limitations inherent in associate degree programs. Associate degree programs typically consist of approximately sixty semester hours of academic credits. When general education requirements are mandated for all degree programs, the number of hours in the field of specialization is diminished. (b) Fairly rigid requirements of many state licensure and regulatory bodies. Community colleges already face stringent requirements from state agencies. Often, state agencies are mandating more semester hours in specialty training, while regional accrediting bodies are mandating more hours in general education courses. The result is additional hours being added to associate degree programs. (c) Time needed by many students for remedial and developmental studies. Community colleges shoulder a disproportionate burden of the remedial instruction in higher education. Developmental course requirements, along with more general education and specialized courses, make an associate degree a three-year program for increasing numbers of full-time students.
- Remedial programs. A greater proportion of students in community colleges are enrolled in remedial courses compared to students at four-year universities. Many

elite universities, in fact, have the luxury of exclusive admissions procedures that restrict entry to exclude students with remedial education needs.

- Nontraditional programs. Community colleges have been pioneers in higher education in the development of experiential learning credit, telecommunications learning, and off-campus learning centers.
- Contractual programs. In a concerted effort to serve the diverse needs of the local community, two-year colleges typically enter into contractual arrangements with local businesses and industry to provide specialized workforce training.
- Outcomes assessment. The assessment of outcomes in the community college setting is hampered by the diverse goals of the students attending classes at these institutions. Some students attend class with the intent of earning a certificate or two-year degree and immediately entering the workforce. Others enter with the intent to transfer to a four-year university. Still others are simply trying to improve current job skills or take classes for personal enrichment.
- Impacts of specialized accreditation. Specialized accreditation has been previously discussed in this report. Specialized accreditation can represent a significant burden for community colleges due to the significant expense involved. The process can also be critical to the acceptance of the colleges' programs in the eyes of employers and four-year institutions.

Palinchak (1993) calls attention to the unique role that community colleges play in higher education today.. While acknowledging that community colleges share critical elements with baccalaureate-granting institutions, he says that two-year colleges are distinguished by "their ability to accommodate nontraditional students with a range of

academic and work-oriented programs that require effective teaching, different delivery modes, measurable learning, and active rejection of social, cultural, ethnic, and gender stereotypes" (Palinchak, 1993, p. 14).

According to Prairie (1994), community colleges have a distinct disadvantage in the accrediting process because of the non-traditional mission of these institutions. He states that standards of accreditation are modeled after the traditional liberal arts college. As a result, the standards are often difficult to apply to specialized or non-traditional institutions.

Simmons (1993) points out two additional concerns for community colleges. Referencing studies conducted by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, he states that community colleges endure greater levels of political interference in management, governance, and operations than other educational institutions. This appears logical due to the fact that public universities primarily deal with state bureaucracies alone, while community colleges have the additional burdens that come with local taxing districts. These burdens include, but are not limited to, local boards and local elections.

Local boards are central to the success of community colleges. The local governance allows these colleges to quickly respond to the changing needs of the local community. The local board can also create problems for the efficient operation of a two-year college. Since board members are active members of the local community, college administrators must often deal with micro-management on the part of over-zealous board members. Accrediting bodies are clear in their demands that the day-to-

day operations of these institutions remain the responsibility of college administrators – not board members.

Local board members are elected through local elections which often create problems for community colleges. These elections are subject to the influence of special interest groups which, in some cases, can result in single-issue trustees. Such board members can engage in divisiveness that is detrimental to the success of the two-year institution.

Finally, fiscal cuts in recent years have hit community colleges especially hard (Simmons, 1993). Two areas that have been hard-hit are the maintenance of learning resources and faculty balance.

When budgets are cut, one of the first areas to suffer is the library, which is an integral part of any accreditation review. Community college students often need more assistance than four-year college students in learning how to use library and learning resources. As a result of budget cuts, many two-year colleges are moving toward cooperative and collaborative relationships with other institutions to share learning resources through electronic means (Simmons, 1993).

Also, budget cuts lead many schools to replace full-time faculty positions with two or more part-time instructors. This, again, is an area of primary concern in the accreditation process. While accrediting agencies hesitate to impose blanket prescriptions for an appropriate faculty mix, agencies must be concerned about colleges that view the use of adjunct and part-time faculty solely as a means to balance the budget and not as a means of enhancing student learning outcomes (Simmons, 1993).

Cost-Effectiveness of Accreditation. In 1991, a study was conducted among presidents of colleges and universities in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The study was designed to survey the attitudes of presidents toward the importance of regional accreditation. According to Waggener (1991), only 14.4 percent of the presidents felt that accreditation was "very important." This would seem to many to be significant for the success of regional accreditation as it is currently implemented.

One possible reason for the presidents' responses has been proposed by Reidlinger and Prager (1993). Their research indicates that many in higher education feel that the costs of accreditation outweigh the benefits for many institutions. This appears to be true for community colleges in greater numbers than other types of institutions.

Anderson (1987) conducted a national survey of accreditation issues and found that two-year campuses in particular have had reason to question accreditation's price and value. Many cost-related items were included in the survey, and two-year institutions had greater reservations about accreditation's worth than did their senior counterparts for almost every item the survey queried. Reidlinger and Prager (1993) have suggested that this difference of opinion occurred because two-year institutions make greater use than other institutions of additional assessment indices. These assessment tools include local advisory boards and external program reviews. With significant costs already involved in these assessment tools, accreditation is possibly viewed as an unnecessary – and costly – duplication.

Further evidence questioning the cost-effectiveness of accreditation for community colleges can be found in Anderson's survey. In 1986, two-year colleges averaged five specialized programs per institution compared to seven for comprehensive

schools and fifteen for universities. In the three years prior to the survey, however, two-year schools received 2,798 total visits compared to 1,676 visits for comprehensive institutions and 1,030 for universities (Anderson, 1987). Anderson concludes that two-year colleges were shouldering a disproportionate share of the burden of the costs of accreditation visits.

Relevance of the Literature to the Problem Being Studied

There appears to be a knowledge void in the specific area proposed for research. Generic information about accreditation is available, but there are no specific data on recommendations given to SACS institutions during site team visits. This research will attempt to fill that knowledge void.

Summary

Considerable information regarding higher education's unique system of regional accreditation is available. Most of the research that has been conducted addresses the historical development of the regional associations and the on-going debates over the system's ability to insure educational quality at America's institutions of higher education.

Since 1913, a system of six regional accrediting associations has developed for the express purpose of insuring the educational integrity of institutions of higher education in the U.S. Although the six associations are separate entities, they each perform similar administrative oversight functions. At the center of the oversight function is the self-study process and the accreditation site visit.

There is considerable debate as to the effectiveness of accrediting associations' efforts to insure educational quality. While several specific areas have been discussed in the review of the literature, two notable disagreements deal with the role of the federal government in the accreditation process and the appropriate methods to measure educational quality.

This author's research adds to the current body of research by providing information that can have practical applications for institutions currently involved in the accreditation renewal process.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The author has attempted, through the methodology outlined below, to provide recent historical data that can have practical applications for community colleges entering the accreditation renewal process. In addition to its practical applications, the results of the study may also lead to additional areas of concern that can provide opportunities for additional research.

Population and/or Sample

The Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) categorizes colleges and universities by the highest degree offered by that institution (SACS, 1998). The result is six different levels of institutions as found below:

Level I – Associate Degree as highest degree,

Level II – Baccalaureate Degree as highest degree,

Level III – Master's Degree as highest degree,

Level IV – Master's Degree and Education Specialist Degree as highest degree,

Level V – Three or fewer Doctoral Degrees as highest degrees, and

Level VI – Four or more Doctoral Degrees as highest degrees.

Community colleges are considered by SACS to be Level I institutions. As of December 1997, there were more Level I institutions in the Southern Association than

any other type. Forty percent (307 out of 775) of the member institutions in SACS were considered to be Level I schools (SACS, 1998).

Since the goal of this study is to provide information for community colleges entering the accreditation renewal process, the overall population in this study will be Level I institutions within the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A sample has been chosen from this population to identify any trends that may be present in recent site visit recommendations. For the purposes of this study, visiting committee reports from the most recent three-year period have been utilized. The three years included are 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99. According to the Commission on Colleges, sixty-seven Level I institutions received site visits during those three years (SACS, 1999). The visiting committee reports from those sixty-seven institutions were targeted for inclusion in this study.

Data Collection

Data have been collected from the visiting committee reports of the Level I institutions which had site visits between the Fall of 1996 and the Spring of 1999. These reports are on file at Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) headquarters in Decatur, Georgia.

Visiting committee reports are *not* public information. As a result, an individual must have permission from each specific institution to access that college's visiting committee report. Therefore, with the assistance of Ms. Carol Luthman and Mr. Steve Whittington of the Commission on Colleges staff at SACS, a list of the names of institutions, addresses, and contact persons for colleges meeting the criteria of the study was obtained. A list of eligible institutions is included in Appendix A.

Permission forms were mailed to each college in order to receive written permission to study the institutions' reports. These forms were mailed to the president of each institution. The recipients were asked to sign and return a form granting permission for release of the contents of the institution's visiting committee report to the author of this study. In an effort to enhance the viability of the study in the eyes of the participating institutions, a letter of support was included in the mail-out from Dr. James Rogers, Executive Director of the Commission on Colleges. This letter acknowledged the commission's knowledge of and interest in the study and its possible results. Copies of the letter of request, the permission form, and the letter of support from Dr. Rogers are included in Appendix B through D.

The requirement of obtaining permission from each college resulted in less than 100% participation of institutions in the study. In fact, two colleges declined to participate in this study. The reports of the remaining sixty-five institutions that have granted permission have been analyzed in person at SACS headquarters during three separate visits in July 1999, March 2000 and June 2000.

Variables

There are approximately 400 separate criteria listed in SACS' *Criteria for Accreditation*. Each of these criteria must be considered a potential variable in this study. One would expect many criteria to be mentioned in the reports of one or more institutions. Other criteria will likely never surface in any report.

Procedures

The four hundred plus criteria are grouped into categories in the *Criteria for Accreditation* (SACS, 1996). The six broad categories are listed below along with the total number of criteria within each category and the percentage of the overall criteria represented by that category:

I. Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation – 67 (16.6%)

II. Institutional Purpose – 7 (1.7%)

III. Institutional Effectiveness – 12 (3.0%)

IV. Educational Programs – 149 (36.9%)

V. Educational Support Services – 81 (20.0%)

VI. Administrative Processes – 88 (21.8%)

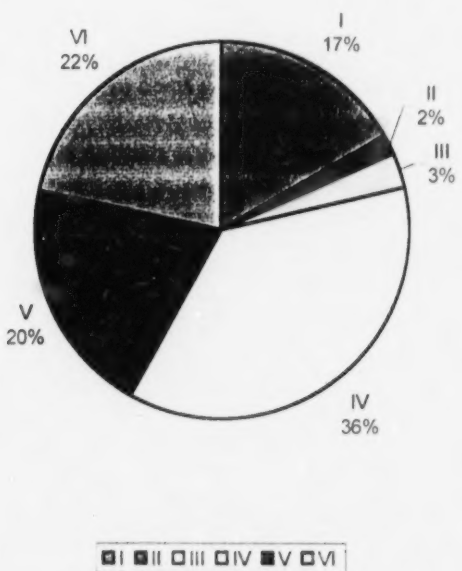

Figure 3.1. Distribution of Criteria

Within these broad categories there are groups and even sub-groups. For example, in category IV, Educational Programs, nine different sections are included, one of them being "Faculty." Under the "Faculty" section are ten sub-groupings including topics such as part-time faculty, faculty compensation, and professional growth.

The goal of this study has been to review results on the broad category level, then to report results for each specific criteria. This should provide important data for persons interested in generalities, as well as persons interested in specific details within the *Criteria*. The results of this study will demonstrate which of the six sections of the *Criteria* generate the most recommendations for two-year colleges. The results will also identify the specific criteria that are most frequently cited by visiting committees. Together, these results can benefit persons involved in the accreditation process at most any level.

Data Analysis

The results of this study have been analyzed by using simple descriptive statistics. These statistics include the total number and percentage of responses, as well as the mean, median, and mode. The statistics have been calculated for the entire survey population of sixty-five institutions, but also have been grouped into smaller classifications: by state, by size, and by governance structure.

Results for states are reported for each of the eleven states within the jurisdiction of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. These eleven states are listed below with the number of institutions represented in this study:

Alabama - 6

Florida - 4

Georgia - 5

Kentucky - 1

Louisiana - 2

Mississippi - 5

North Carolina - 12

South Carolina - 5

Tennessee - 3

Texas - 9

Virginia - 13

For measuring results by size, the sixty-five responding institutions have been divided into four quartiles according to full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment figures. The quartiles are approximately equal in size, with each group containing at least sixteen colleges. Due to the fact that the total survey size was not evenly divisible by four, the first quartile has seventeen institutions. As a convenience, the quartiles are referred to as Smallest, Small, Large, and Largest. For the purposes of this study, enrollment ranges in the four quartiles are as follows:

Smallest	267 to 1,292
Small	1,330 to 1,984
Large	2,053 to 3,432
Largest	3,488 to 21,705

There are two types of governance typically found in Level I institutions: public and private. Sixty-one colleges in this survey are public institutions, while only four are private.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter focuses on the results of the research study. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a concerted effort has been made by the author to report broad, general results, as well as specifics. To that end, this chapter has been organized into four distinct sections:

1. Overall results;
2. Results organized by state;
3. Results organized by enrollment size (quartiles); and
4. Results organized by governance structure.

In some instances, data are summarized in tables and figures to provide the reader with a quick synopsis of survey results. In all instances, the results are discussed in depth in the context of the following organization:

1. Number of recommendations – includes the range of results, along with the statistical mean, median, and when applicable, mode.
2. Distribution of recommendations – compares the percentage of recommendations cited within each section of the *Criteria for Accreditation* to the percentage of "must" statements in each section.
3. Most frequent recommendations – places in rank order the specific criteria that are cited most frequently in visiting committee reports.
4. Summation – provides a brief recap of the noteworthy findings from each section.

Overall Results

Number of Recommendations

The range of results provides information regarding the dispersion of data among the survey participants. The lower end of the range of results for this particular survey reflects three recommendations. Two colleges in the survey achieved this commendable result. At the other end of the spectrum, however, is one institution that received 73 recommendations. It should be noted that this upper end of the range is quite unusual. The next highest result, 52, is well below the maximum.

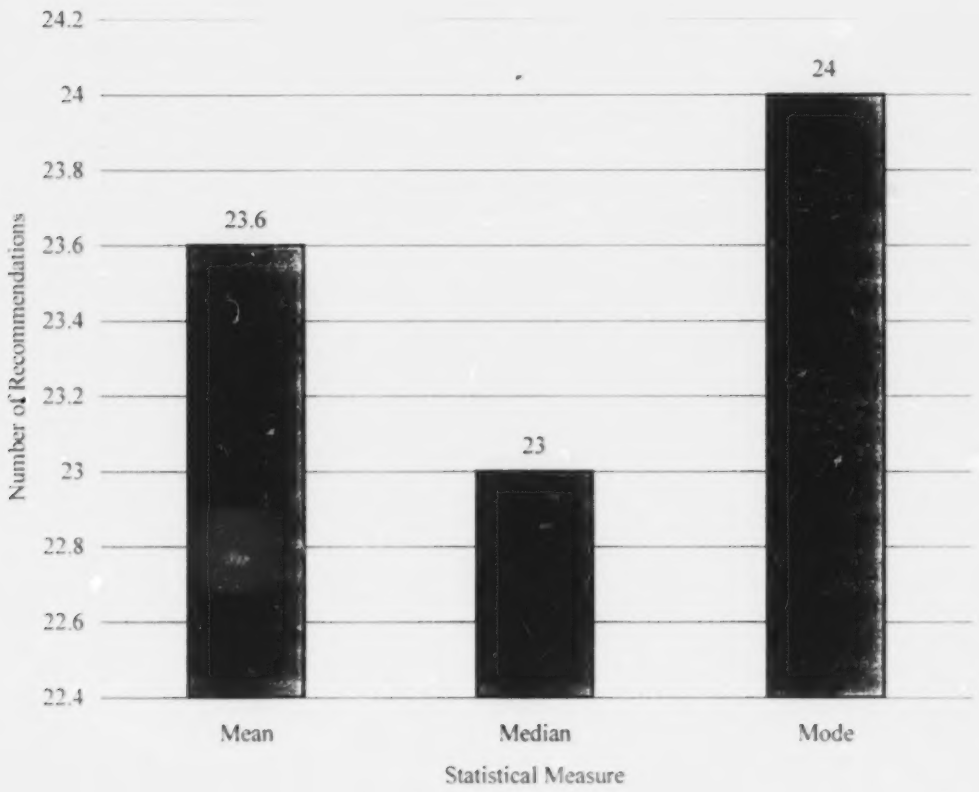

Figure 4.1. Statistical Measures of the Number of Recommendations for All Institutions

Figure 4.1 shows the mean, median, and mode for the total numbers of recommendations received by participating institutions. The resulting numbers for these three statistics are quite similar. The overall mean, or average, number of recommendations is 23.6. The median, which represents the mid-point among the sixty-five institutions, is 23. Finally, the mode – the most frequently occurring number of recommendations – is 24.

Distribution of Recommendations

As noted in a previous chapter, the 404 "must" statements contained in the *Criteria* are divided into six sections. Table 4.1 compares the percentage of criteria, or "must" statements, in each section to the percentage of total recommendations made by visiting committees.

Table 4.1

"Must" Statements in the Criteria vs. Total Recommendations from Visiting Committees

Section	"Musts"	Recommendations
I	16.6%	2.7%
II	1.7%	1.8%
III	3.0%	11.5%
IV	36.9%	44.5%
V	20.0%	20.2%
VI	21.8%	19.3%

Of the six sections, three appear to have noticeable discrepancies between the percentage of "must" statements and the percentage of total recommendations. Section I, "Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation," contains 16.6% of the total criteria, but

results in only 2.7% of all recommendations. The relatively low number of recommendations in section I appears to be offset by substantial numbers of recommendations in sections III and IV. Section III, "Institutional Effectiveness," has only 3% of the criteria, but more than 11% of all recommendations. Section IV, "Educational Program," has almost 37% of all criteria, but accounts for approximately 44.5% of the total number of recommendations.

The findings in Section III are particularly noteworthy due to the small number of overall criteria contained in the section. This section contains only 12 "must" statements. These statements, however, account for 176 recommendations to the 65 institutions.

Most Frequent Recommendations

Close scrutiny of the specific recommendations given to survey participants finds one particular criterion being cited most often. This criterion can be found in Section IV, "Educational Program," under the sub-heading "Faculty." The statement reads as follows:

> In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree, or hold the minimum of a master's degree with a major in the teaching discipline. (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

This particular recommendation was cited to 84.6% (55 out of 65) of the participating institutions. Stated differently, only ten schools did *not* receive a recommendation regarding this specific criterion.

Several factors can possibly account for the large number of recommendations in the area of faculty credentials. Level I colleges have dozens—in some cases, hundreds –

of faculty members. Appropriate credentials are required for full-time, as well as part-time, instructors. This is a criterion that demands 100% compliance. If one faculty member falls one hour shy of the 18 graduate-hour requirement, the institution will receive a recommendation in this area. This is also a criterion that is easy for visiting team members to investigate, since records of academic preparation are present in each instructor's permanent employment file.

It is the opinion of this author that few, if any, institutions receiving recommendations in this area are intentionally trying to deceive the public by using unqualified instructors. The very nature of the community college mission calls for rapid response to the changing needs in the local community. Yet, rapid response often entails hiring a competent faculty member with the intent of that instructor completing additional coursework in the near future to satisfy credential requirements. Visiting committees often arrive on campus before such academic coursework has successfully been completed.

Second and third places on the list both come from Section III, "Institutional Effectiveness." The two criteria, in fact, are quite similar. Both statements outline four identical requirements for institutions regarding institutional effectiveness. The only difference in the two criteria is that one deals with educational programs while the other deals with administrative and educational support services.

The first criterion reads as follows:

For each administrative and educational support service unit, institutions **must**

1. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
2. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
3. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit

4. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

This criterion was cited in 66.2% (43 out of 65) of the visiting committee reports, compared to 53.8% (35 out of 65) for the criterion dealing with the institutional effectiveness of educational programs, which reads:

> The institution **must**
> 1. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
> 2. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
> 3. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
> 4. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

Fourth place on the list was once again located in the area of "Faculty" within the "Educational Program" section of the *Criteria for Accreditation*. Forty-nine percent (32 out of 65) of the respondents were cited for not keeping appropriate documentation related to the academic preparation of full-time and part-time faculty members, as required by the following "must" statement:

> It **is the responsibility** of the institution to keep on file for all full-time and part-time faculty members documentation of academic preparation, such as official transcripts and, if appropriate for demonstrating competency, official documentation of professional and work experience, technical and performance competency, records of publications, certifications and other qualifications. (SACS, 1996, p. 45)

Two recommendations tie for fifth place on the list of most-frequently cited criteria. Both "must" statements were cited on 26 visiting committee reports, or 40% of the 65 institutions included in the survey. The first is yet another criterion from the "Educational Program" section of the *Criteria*. This statement requires all institutions to demonstrate that graduates of degree programs are competent in reading, writing, speech, math, and computer usage. The criterion reads as follows:

> The institution **must** demonstrate that its graduates of degree programs are competent in reading, writing, oral communication, fundamental mathematical skills and the basic use of computers. (SACS, 1996, p. 28)

In virtually all cases, the institutional shortcomings found in this area deal with oral communication and/or the use of computers.

The second criterion is the first to come from Section VI, "Administrative Processes." The criterion calls for the regular evaluation of institutional procedures for budget planning:

> Procedures for budget planning **must** be evaluated regularly. (SACS, 1996, p. 72)

The remaining recommendations from the "Top Ten" list follow. Each statement is preceded by the numerical position on the list and is followed by the number of colleges that were cited for non-compliance:

7. (tie) Further, an institution **must** demonstrate that it achieves these goals and that its distance learning programs are effective and comply with all applicable *Criteria*. (25) (SACS, 1996, p. 41)
7. (tie) A comprehensive safety plan **must** be developed, implemented and evaluated. (25) (SACS, 1996, p. 78)
9. All aspects of fund raising **must** be incorporated into the planning process and evaluated regularly. (24) (SACS, 1996, p. 70)
10. The institution **must** demonstrate that it uses the results of this evaluation for improvement of the faculty and its educational program. (23) (SACS, 1996, p. 53)

Results Organized by State

The following section focuses on the survey results for each of the states within the jurisdiction of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Although there are 11 states within the boundaries of SACS, only nine are reported in depth in this section. Two states are not being reported due to privacy concerns caused by the small number of respondents from each state.

Charts summarizing and comparing the state results for the statistical mean, median, and mode follow in Figures 4.2 through 4.4. Tables that summarize the number and distribution of recommendations for each individual state are included in the text. Also included are listings of the most frequent recommendations from each state. This information is placed in order of frequency, beginning with the most frequent. The number of institutions receiving citations, as well as the sample size for the entire state, is included in parentheses at the end of each recommendation.

Alabama

Number of recommendations. The number of total recommendations received by Level I institutions in the State of Alabama ranged from a low of 13 to a high of 52. It should be noted that 52 recommendations represent the second-highest number from any college included in this report.

Mean, median, and mode results for institutions in Alabama are compared with results from other states in Figures 4.2 through 4.4. While there is no statistical mode for Alabama, the mean and the median both rank near the middle of results for all states. The mean of 26.7 places the state fourth highest among southern colleges for most recommendations, while the median of 21.5 ranks sixth, the midpoint for the eleven states.

Distribution of recommendations. Table 4.2 displays the distribution of recommendations among the six sections of the *Criteria* for the Level I institutions located in the State of Alabama. The table compares this particular state's distribution

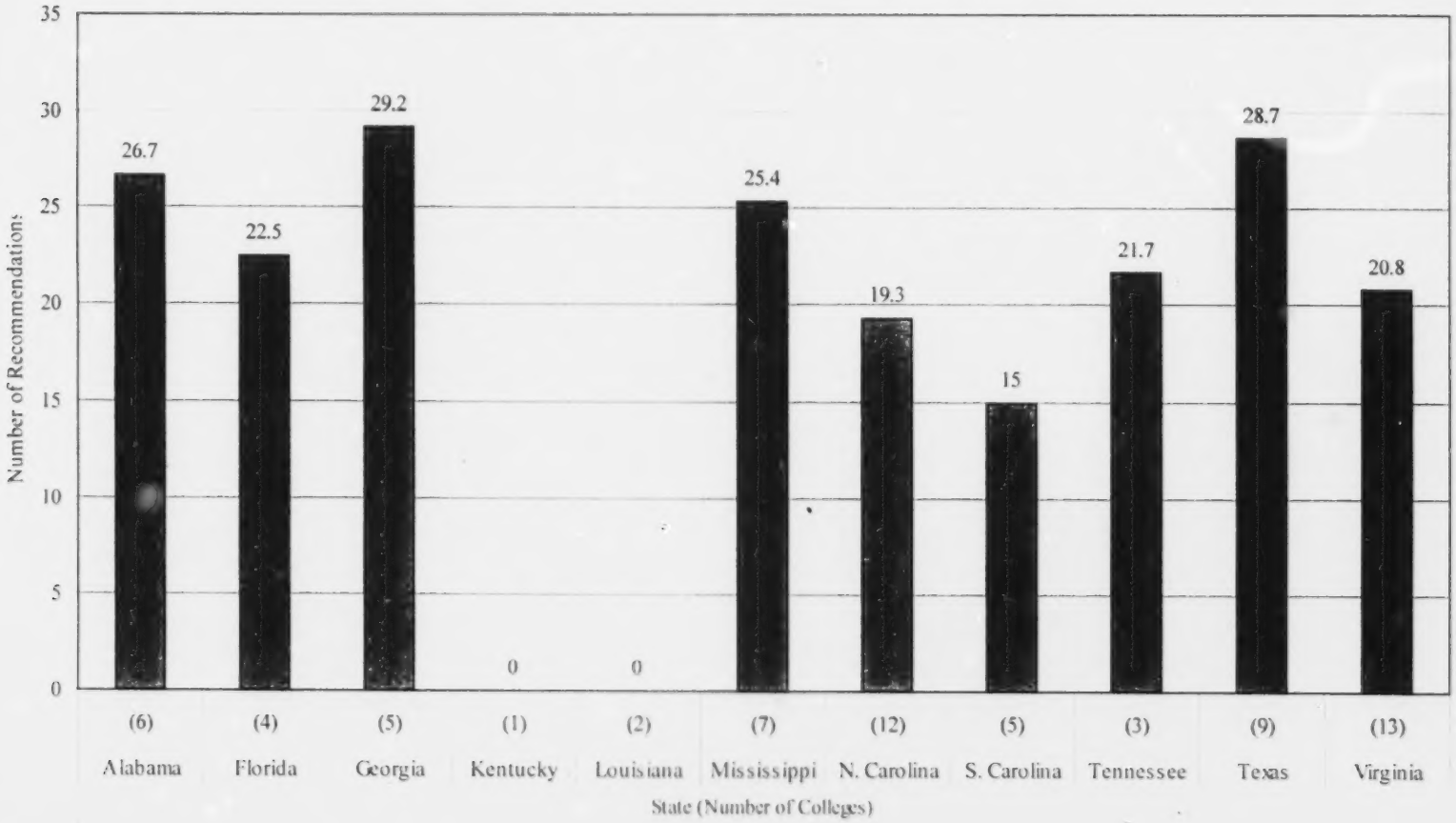

Figure 4.2. Statistical Mean for Each State

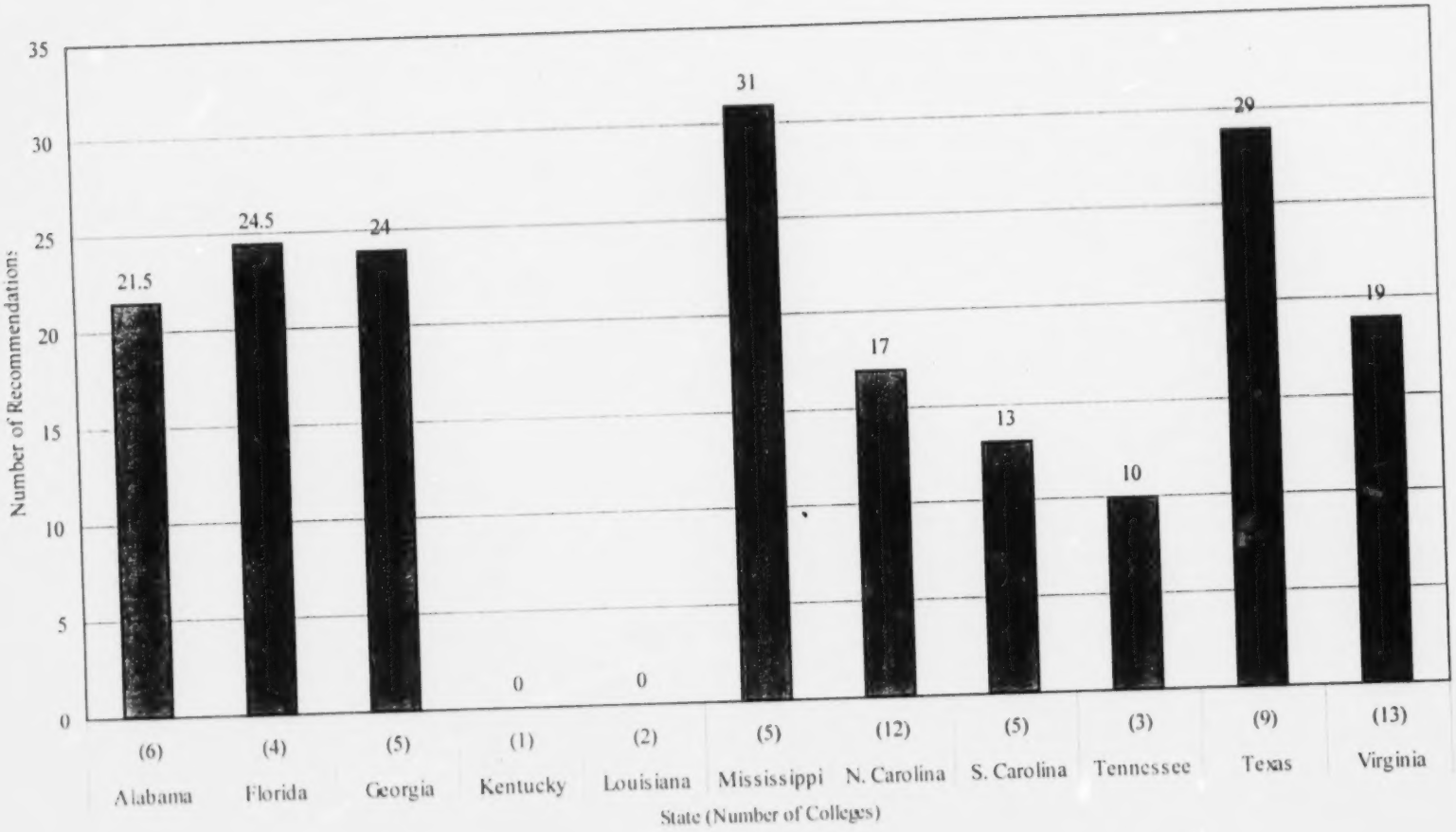

Figure 4.3. Statistical Median for Each State

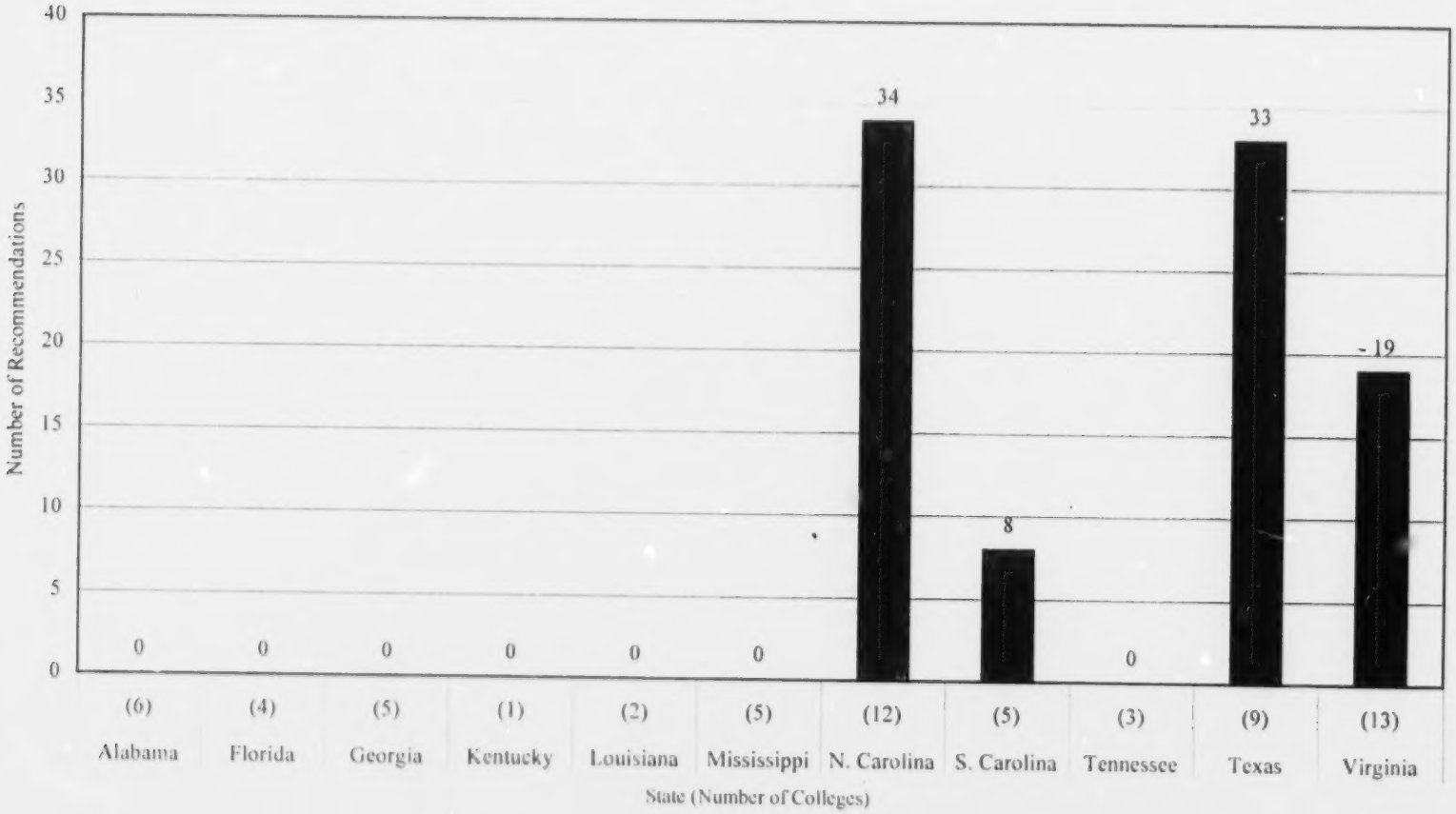

Figure 4.4. Statistical Mode for Each State

Table 4.2

Distribution of Recommendations - Alabama

Section	Alabama	All States
I	2.5%	2.7%
II	1.9%	1.8%
III	10.6%	11.5%
IV	36.9%	44.5%
V	20.6%	20.2%
VI	27.5%	19.3%

Note: Range = 13 to 52; Mean = 26.7; Median = 21.5; Mode = n/a.

with the overall distribution of the entire survey sample. The most notable discrepancy can be found in Section VI, "Administrative Processes." With 27.5% of all recommendations occurring in this area, Alabama has a greater percentage of failures to comply with criteria in this category than any other state.

Most frequent recommendations. The five recommendations most frequently cited for Level I institutions in Alabama are found below. Two of the five can be found at the top of the overall results, as well. These statements are the first, dealing with faculty credentials, and the third, regarding institutional effectiveness. The fourth recommendation listed, which relates to defining and publicizing the duties of various administrative officials, ties for third in Alabama, but fails to appear in the Top Ten of the results for all institutions.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (6 of 6) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. The institution **must** demonstrate that it uses the results of this evaluation for improvement of the faculty and its educational program. (5 of 6) (SACS, 1996, p. 53)

3. (tie) For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (4 of 6) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

3. (tie) The duties of the chief executive officer, and of other administrative officials directly responsible to the chief executive, **must** be clearly defined and made known to faculty and staff. (4 of 6) (SACS, 1996, p. 70)

3. (tie) A comprehensive safety plan **must** be developed, implemented and evaluated regularly. (4 of 6) (SACS, 1996, p. 78)

Summation. Community colleges in Alabama have a greater proportion of recommendations in "Administrative Processes" than any other state.

Florida

Number of recommendations. The range of recommendation totals for Florida institutions varies from a low of four to a high of 37. Mean, median, and mode statistics for Florida institutions are compared with other states in Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4. These figures show that the mean number of recommendations is 22.5, and the median is 24.5. The mean figure represents the midpoint (sixth place) among participating states and the median represents the fourth highest result.

Distribution of recommendations. A comparison of the distribution of recommendations between the state of Florida and the entire jurisdiction of the Southern

Table 4.3

Distribution of Recommendations – Florida

Section	Florida	All States
I	6.7%	2.7%
II	1.1%	1.8%
III	4.4%	11.5%
IV	47.8%	44.5%
V	24.4%	20.2%
VI	15.6%	19.3%

Note: Range = 4 to 37; Mean = 22.5; Median = 24.5; Mode = n/a.

Association can be found in Table 4.3. The percentages represent the distribution of recommendations among the six sections of the *Criteria* for Level I institutions. The comparative data for Florida reveal that this state, along with South Carolina, shares the distinction of having a greater percentage of recommendations (6.7%) in Section I, "Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation," than any other state. At the same time, Florida has the lowest percentage of recommendations (4.4%) among all the states in Section III, "Institutional Effectiveness." In fact, all other states have at least 10% of their recommendations in the area of Institutional Effectiveness.

Most frequent recommendations. Due to the small number of Florida schools included in the study (four), the list of most frequent recommendations outlined below shows nine recommendations tied for third place. The first two places contain two of the top four statements from the overall results. It is interesting to note that the second and third place recommendations from the overall list, both dealing with institutional effectiveness, are nowhere to be found on the list for the State of Florida.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (4 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. It **is the responsibility** of the institution to keep on file for all full-time and part-time faculty members documentation of academic preparation, such as official transcripts and, if appropriate for demonstrating competency, official documentation of professional and work experience, technical and performance competency, records of publications, certifications and other qualifications. (3 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 45)

3. (tie) In catalogs, brochures and advertisements a member institution **must** describe its relationship with the Commission only according to the following statement. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 14)

3. (tie) An institution must publish its grading policies, and its grading practices **must** be consistent with policy. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 30)

3. (tie) Further, an institution **must** demonstrate that it achieves these goals and that its distance learning programs are effective and comply with all applicable criteria. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 41)

3. (tie) Each full-time and part-time faculty member teaching courses in professional, occupational and technical areas other than physical activities courses that are components of associate degree programs designed for college transfer, or from which substantial numbers of students transfer to senior institutions, **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree, or hold the minimum of the master's degree with a major in the teaching discipline. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 45)

3. (tie) The minimum academic degree for faculty teaching in professional, occupation and technical areas **must** be at the same level at which the faculty member is teaching. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996. p. 45)

3. (tie) The institution **must** demonstrate that it uses the results of this evaluation for improvement of the faculty and its educational program. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 53)

3. (tie) The number of library support staff members **must** be adequate. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 59)

3. (tie) Procedures for budget planning **must** be evaluated regularly. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 72)

3. (tie) Investment policies and guidelines **must** be evaluated regularly. (2 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 76)

Summation. Institutions from the State of Florida have an impressive record of performance in the area of "Institutional Effectiveness." Florida colleges have, by far, the smallest proportion of recommendations in Section III of all states in this survey.

This author would recommend additional research into institutional effectiveness efforts in Level I institutions in the State of Florida. It is possible that the state higher education agency has implemented policies and procedures that have resulted in this exemplary performance. At the same time, it is also possible that the small number of colleges from Florida participating in this study has distorted the overall state performance of Florida institutions with regard to institutional effectiveness.

Georgia

Number of recommendations. The number of recommendations received by institutions in the State of Georgia ranges from a low of nine to a high of 51. The mean, median, and mode statistics are included in Table 4.4. The mean for Georgia colleges is 29.2, and the median is 24. When the results for Georgia are compared with states across the southern U.S., results reveal that the mean for Georgia institutions represents the second-highest number among participating states and the median is the fifth-highest.

Distribution of recommendations. Data regarding the distribution of recommendations that compare the State of Georgia with the entire survey population are found in Table 4.4. The results for Georgia are comparable to the results of the entire Southern Association. In fact, along with the State of Tennessee, Georgia does not have the highest or lowest percentage of recommendations in *any* of the six sections of the *Criteria.*

Table 4.4

Distribution of Recommendations – Georgia

Section	Georgia	All States
I	2.7%	2.7%
II	2.1%	1.8%
III	11.0%	11.5%
IV	45.2%	44.5%
V	19.2%	20.2%
VI	19.9%	19.3%

Note: Range = 9 to 51; Mean = 29.2; Median = 24; Mode = n/a.

Most frequent recommendations. For the most part, the most frequent recommendations for Georgia, listed below, also appear on the Top Ten list for all Level I colleges included in this study. The one notable exception is the recommendation that addresses the evaluation of orientation and advisement programs (tie for third). Georgia is the only state to have this particular criterion cited among the most frequent recommendations.

1. (tie) The core **must** include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural sciences/mathematics. (4 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 28)

1. (tie) In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (4 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

3. (tie) For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit

d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (3 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

3. (tie) Orientation and advisement programs **must** be evaluated regularly and used to enhance assistance to students. (3 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 40)

3. (tie) All aspects of fund raising **must** be directly related to the purpose of the institution. (3 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 70)

Summation. The distribution of results for Level I colleges in Georgia is perhaps the most representative of the entire Southern Association. The percentage of recommendations in each of the six sections is virtually identical to the results for the entire survey population.

Kentucky

Statistical data for the State of Kentucky will not be reported in this study. Only one Level I institution in the state received a reaffirmation site visit between 1996 and 1999. Since the presidents of all the participating institutions were promised confidentiality of results, reporting of data for Kentucky would, in effect, be tantamount to revealing the accreditation report for that one college. It should be noted, however, that the results for that particular institution are included in the overall results for all colleges.

Louisiana

Number of recommendations. Mean, median, and mode statistics for the State of Louisiana are included in overall totals, but will not be addressed individually. There are only two colleges from Louisiana included in the survey sample and reporting statewide results could jeopardize the confidentiality of the participating institutions' reports.

Distribution of recommendations. Table 4.5 contains the percentage distribution of recommendations for the State of Louisiana as compared to the entire survey population. The data show that Louisiana has the lowest percentage of recommendations (0.0%) in Section I, "Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation." Louisiana is the *only* state to be completely void of recommendations in one entire section of the *Criteria.*

Table 4.5

Distribution of Recommendations - Louisiana

Section	Louisiana	All States
I	0.0%	2.7%
II	2.5%	1.8%
III	12.5%	11.5%
IV	45.0%	44.5%
V	22.5%	20.2%
VI	17.5%	19.3%

Most frequent recommendations. Again, due to confidentiality concerns, frequency of recommendations for the state of Louisiana will not be addressed here.

Mississippi

Number of recommendations. The range of recommendations received by institutions in the State of Mississippi ranges from a low of 11 to a high of 35. Data comparing the mean, median, and mode statistics for Mississippi colleges can be found in Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4. The mean of 25.4 for this state represents the fifth-highest

number among the southern states. The median of 31 is the highest figure for all states participating in this survey.

Distribution of recommendations. The percentage distribution of recommendations for the State of Mississippi as compared to the entire survey population is located in Table 4.6. The percentage of recommendations in Section VI, "Administrative Processes," is lower for Mississippi than for any other state participating in the study. At the same time, over half of all citations received by community colleges in this state can be found in Section IV, "Educational Program."

Table 4.6

Distribution of Recommendations - Mississippi

Section	Mississippi	All States
I	2.4%	2.7%
II	1.6%	1.8%
III	11.8%	11.5%
IV	50.4%	44.5%
V	20.5%	20.2%
VI	13.4%	19.3%

Note: Range = 11 to 35; Mean = 25.4; Median = 31; Mode = n/a.

Most frequent recommendations. Of the four recommendations listed below for the State of Mississippi, two are common to institutions in most southern states. The recommendations dealing with institutional effectiveness and faculty credentials are commonly found in all states included in the survey. The other two, however, deal with

distance learning programs. One of them, in fact, is unique to the State of Mississippi among these state lists.

1. (tie) The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (4 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

1. (tie) An institution **must** formulate clear and explicit goals for its distance learning programs and demonstrate that they are consistent with the institution's stated purpose. (4 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 41)

1. (tie) Further, an institution **must** demonstrate that it achieves these goals and that its distance learning programs are effective and comply with all applicable *Criteria*. (4 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 41)

1. (tie) In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (4 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

Summation. Mississippi institutions have the smallest percentage of recommendations in the area of "Administrative Processes" of any state in the survey. Also noteworthy is the fact that over 50% of all recommendations in this state come from Section III, "Educational Program."

North Carolina

Number of recommendations. The number of recommendations received by institutions in the State of North Carolina ranges from a low of three to a high of 36. Three recommendations represent the fewest number for any college included in the

survey. The school in North Carolina with three recommendations shares this distinction with one other school in Virginia.

Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 compare the mean, median, and mode statistics for Level I colleges in the State of North Carolina with all institutions in the survey. The mean of 19.2 for North Carolina institutions is the second-lowest figure for all the states. The median of 17 represents the third-lowest figure.

Distribution of recommendations. Data comparing the distribution of recommendations for the State of North Carolina with the distribution for all states are included in Table 4.7. The comparative data for North Carolina show that the state has the highest percentage of recommendations (50.6%) of any state in Section IV, "Educational Program." At the same time, the state has the lowest percentage of recommendations (14.7%) of any other state in Section V, "Educational Support Services."

Table 4.7

Distribution of Recommendations – North Carolina

Section	North Carolina	All States
I	1.7%	2.7%
II	1.3%	1.8%
III	10.0%	11.5%
IV	50.6%	44.5%
V	14.7%	20.2%
VI	21.6%	19.3%

Note: Range = 3 to 36; Mean = 19.2; Median = 17; Mode = 34.

Most frequent recommendations. A list of the most frequently cited recommendations for institutions in North Carolina can be found below. This list closely resembles the results for the entire survey sample. The four criteria cited in this list represent four of the top five responses for all institutions participating in this study.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (9 of 12) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. (tie) The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (7 of 12) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

2. (tie) For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (7 of 12) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

2. (tie) Procedures for budget planning **must** be evaluated regularly. (7 of 12) (SACS, 1996, p. 72)

Summation. There are several noteworthy findings for the State of North Carolina. Colleges in this state have the highest percentage of recommendations in the area of "Educational Program" of all states surveyed. At the same time, it has the lowest percentage of recommendations in "Educational Support Services." Finally, the most frequently cited criteria for North Carolina institutions are the most representative of the entire survey population.

South Carolina

Number of recommendations. The number of recommendations for institutions in the State of South Carolina ranges from a low of 8 to a high of 24. The mean, median, and mode statistics for South Carolina are compared with the results from the entire southern region in Figures 4.2 through 4.4. *With a mean of 15 recommendations, South Carolina has the lowest average number of recommendations of any state in the survey.* The median of 13 places this state second in terms of the lowest median amount.

Distribution of recommendations. A comparison of the distribution of recommendations between the State of South Carolina and the entire jurisdiction of the Southern Association is located in Table 4.8. The most notable statistic for this state appears to be the results for Section I, "Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation." The percentage of recommendations in this area (6.7%) for South Carolina is, along with the state of Florida, higher than that of any other state.

Table 4.8

Distribution of Recommendations – South Carolina

Section	South Carolina	All States
I	6.7%	2.7%
II	1.3%	1.8%
III	10.7%	11.5%
IV	37.3%	44.5%
V	24.0%	20.2%
VI	20.0%	19.3%

Note: Range = 8 to 24; Mean = 15; Median = 13; Mode = 8.

Most frequent recommendations. Listed below are the recommendations cited most frequently for Level I colleges in the State of South Carolina. The three criteria mentioned for South Carolina represent numbers one, two and four on the overall list for all institutions.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (4 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. (tie) The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (3 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

2. (tie) It **is the responsibility** of the institution to keep on file for all full-time and part-time faculty members documentation of academic preparation, such as official transcripts and, if appropriate for demonstrating competency, official documentation of professional and work experience, technical and performance competency, records of publications, certifications and other qualifications. (3 of 5) (SACS, 1996, p. 45)

Summation. South Carolina has the distinction of having the fewest number of overall recommendations of any state in the survey. The range of recommendations (16) is also smaller than that of any other state.

Tennessee

Number of recommendations. The number of recommendations received by institutions in the State of Tennessee ranges from a low of six to a high of 49. This represents the widest range of results for any southern state.

Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 contain the mean, median, and mode statistics for colleges in Tennessee and compare the results with the overall sample. While the mean of 21.7 is the fifth-smallest among all states, Tennessee institutions have the lowest median statistic, ten. This discrepancy appears to be caused by the relatively small number of schools from Tennessee (3) in the survey sample and the wide spread between the lowest and highest results (6, 49).

Distribution of recommendations. Table 4.9 displays the distribution of recommendations among the six sections of the *Criteria* for the Level I institutions located in the state of Tennessee. The percentages for Tennessee are compared to the results for all institutions participating in the survey. Much like the State of Georgia, Tennessee does not have the highest or lowest percentage of recommendations in *any* particular section of the *Criteria*.

Table 4.9

Distribution of Recommendations - Tennessee

Section	Tennessee	All States
I	3.1%	2.7%
II	1.5%	1.8%
III	13.8%	11.5%
IV	40.0%	44.5%
V	20.0%	20.2%
VI	21.5%	19.3%

Note: Range = 6 to 49; Mean = 21.7; Median = 10; Mode = n/a.

Most frequent recommendations. The most frequently cited recommendations for Level I colleges in the State of Tennessee are listed below. Due to the small number of institutions included in the survey sample from this particular state (3), the six recommendations cited all tied for first place on the state's list. Two of the six criteria listed are unique among state lists to the State of Tennessee. The two "must" statements both deal with distance learning classes. The first addresses faculty credentials for those teaching distance learning classes and the second requires adequate library and learning resources for distance learning students.

1. (tie) The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (2 of 3) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

1. (tie) For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (2 of 3) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

1. (tie) In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (2 of 3) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

1. (tie) It **is the responsibility** of the institution to keep on file for all full-time and part-time faculty members documentation of academic preparation, such as official transcripts and, if appropriate for demonstrating competency, official documentation of professional and work experience, technical and performance competency, records of publications, certifications and other qualifications. (2 of 3) (SACS, 1996, p. 45)

1. (tie) Institutions offering courses for credit through distance learning activities and programs **must** meet all criteria related to faculty. (2 of 3) (SACS, 1996, p. 49)

1. (tie) For distance learning resources, an institution **must** ensure the provision of and ready access to adequate library/learning resources and services to support the courses, programs and degrees offered. (2 of 3) (SACS, 1996, p. 59)

Summation. Tennessee institutions have the unusual distinction of having the lowest median result while also having the greatest range of results (43) of any other state participating in the survey.

Texas

Number of recommendations. The number of recommendations for Texas colleges ranges from a low of 17 to a high of 38. The tables in Figures 4.2 through 4.4 compare the mean, median, and mode statistics for the State of Texas with the statistics from the entire survey population. Texas institutions have the third-highest mean number of recommendations of any state at 28.7. The median of 29 represents the third-highest number for this particular statistic as well.

Distribution of recommendations. Data regarding the distribution of recommendations comparing the State of Texas with the entire survey population are found in Table 4.10. Of the eleven states included in the overall population, Texas has the highest percentage of recommendations in Section II, "Institutional Purpose."

Most frequent recommendations. Listed below are the most frequently cited recommendations for institutions in the State of Texas. Texas holds the distinction of being the *only* state in which faculty credentials do not appear at the top of this list. Top

Table 4.10

Distribution of Recommendations - Texas

Section	Texas	All States
I	1.9%	2.7%
II	2.7%	1.8%
III	12.4%	11.5%
IV	43.4%	44.5%
V	20.5%	20.2%
VI	19.0%	19.3%

Note: Range = 17 to 38; Mean = 28.7; Median = 29; Mode = 33.

billing in Texas belongs to the institutional effectiveness criteria dealing with the planning and evaluation of administrative and educational support services. It should be noted that the faculty credentials criterion does follow closely in second place. It cannot be discerned from these survey results if one should conclude Texas institutions have less concern with faculty credentials than other states or if Texas has a greater problem with institutional effectiveness.

1. For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (8 of 9) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

2. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (7 of 9) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

3. (tie) The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (5 of 9) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

3. (tie) The core **must** include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural sciences/mathematics. (5 of 9) (SACS, 1996, p. 28)

3. (tie) The institution **must** demonstrate that its graduates of degree programs are competent in reading, writing, oral communication, fundamental mathematical skills and the basic use of computers. (5 of 9) (SACS, 1996, p. 28)

3. (tie) The content and design of publications produced and distributed by an institution **must** be accurate and consistent in describing the institution and rigorously adhere to principles of good educational practice. (5 of 9) (SACS, 1996, p. 40)

3. (tie) The plan **must** be operational and evaluated annually. (5 of 9) (SACS, 1996, p. 78)

It might also be said that the results for Texas are unusual in other ways. Two of the seven criteria on Texas' list are unique to that state. The last two statements require accuracy of institutional publications and the annual evaluation of maintenance plans. Two other statements can be found on the list of only one other state. Those two criteria both deal with undergraduate degree requirements.

Summation. Texas is the only state that does *not* have faculty credentials as the most frequently cited criterion. Texas community colleges do, however, have the highest percentage of recommendations from the section titled "Institutional Purpose."

Virginia

Number of recommendations. The number of recommendations received by institutions in the State of Virginia ranges from a low of three to a high of 40. Three recommendations is the fewest number received by any school participating in this survey. The college in Virginia with three recommendations shares this enviable distinction with one other institution in North Carolina.

Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 compare the mean, median, and mode statistics for colleges located in Virginia to the overall results from the entire southern region. The mean number of recommendations for Virginia institutions is 20.8 and the median is 19. Both of these figures represent the fourth-lowest number among all states.

Distribution of recommendations. A comparison of the distribution of recommendations between the State of Virginia and the entire jurisdiction of the Southern Association is located in Table 4.11. The most notable statistic for this state appears to

Table 4.11

Distribution of Recommendations - Virginia

Section	Virginia	All States
I	1.9%	2.7%
II	1.5%	1.8%
III	14.1%	11.5%
IV	47.4%	44.5%
V	19.3%	20.2%
VI	15.9%	19.3%

Note: Range = 3 to 40; Mean = 20.8; Median = 19; Mode = 19.

be the results for Section III, "Institutional Effectiveness." The percentage of recommendations (14.1%) in this area for Virginia is higher than for any other state.

Most frequent recommendations. The most frequently cited recommendations from the State of Virginia are listed below. One of the three criteria on this list is unique to Virginia. It is the only list among states in the survey that includes the recommendation which deals with the evaluation of the institutional research process.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (12 of 13) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (10 of 13) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

3. An institution **must** regularly evaluate the effectiveness of its institutional research process and use its findings for the improvement of its process. (8 of 13) (SACS, 1996, p. 22)

Summation. Institutional effectiveness (Section III) appears to be a greater problem for Level I colleges in Virginia than for comparable institutions in the Southern Association.

Results Organized by Enrollment Size (Quartiles)

The sixty-five institutions that participated in this survey have been divided into four quartiles according to student enrollment size. The quartiles have been labeled

"Smallest," "Small," "Large," and "Largest" for convenience. These terms are not meant to be descriptive of the institutions with regard to the overall higher education community. Instead, they should be interpreted only as a comparison in terms of the other community colleges included in this particular survey.

Table 4.12 shows the percentage of recommendations received within each section of the *Criteria for Accreditation* according to the enrollment size of the institutions. By definition, the percentages for each quartile total 100%. A low percentage in one section will necessarily result in a higher percentage for other sections. As a result, caution should be used when comparing percentages for one quartile to percentages in another quartile.

Table 4.12

"Must" Statements in the Criteria vs. Recommendations by Quartile

Section	Smallest	Small	Large	Largest	Total
I	2.5%	2.2%	3.9%	2.3%	2.7%
II	1.2%	2.0%	1.0%	2.9%	1.8%
III	12.6%	13.6%	7.8%	11.7%	11.5%
IV	40.7%	49.1%	44.5%	43.4%	44.5%
V	21.7%	14.6%	25.3%	19.2%	20.2%
VI	21.2%	18.4%	17.4%	20.4%	19.3%

The mean, median, and mode for the four quartiles can be found in Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7. Tables containing the number and distribution of recommendations for each quartile are included in the text. The most frequent recommendations for each quartile are listed

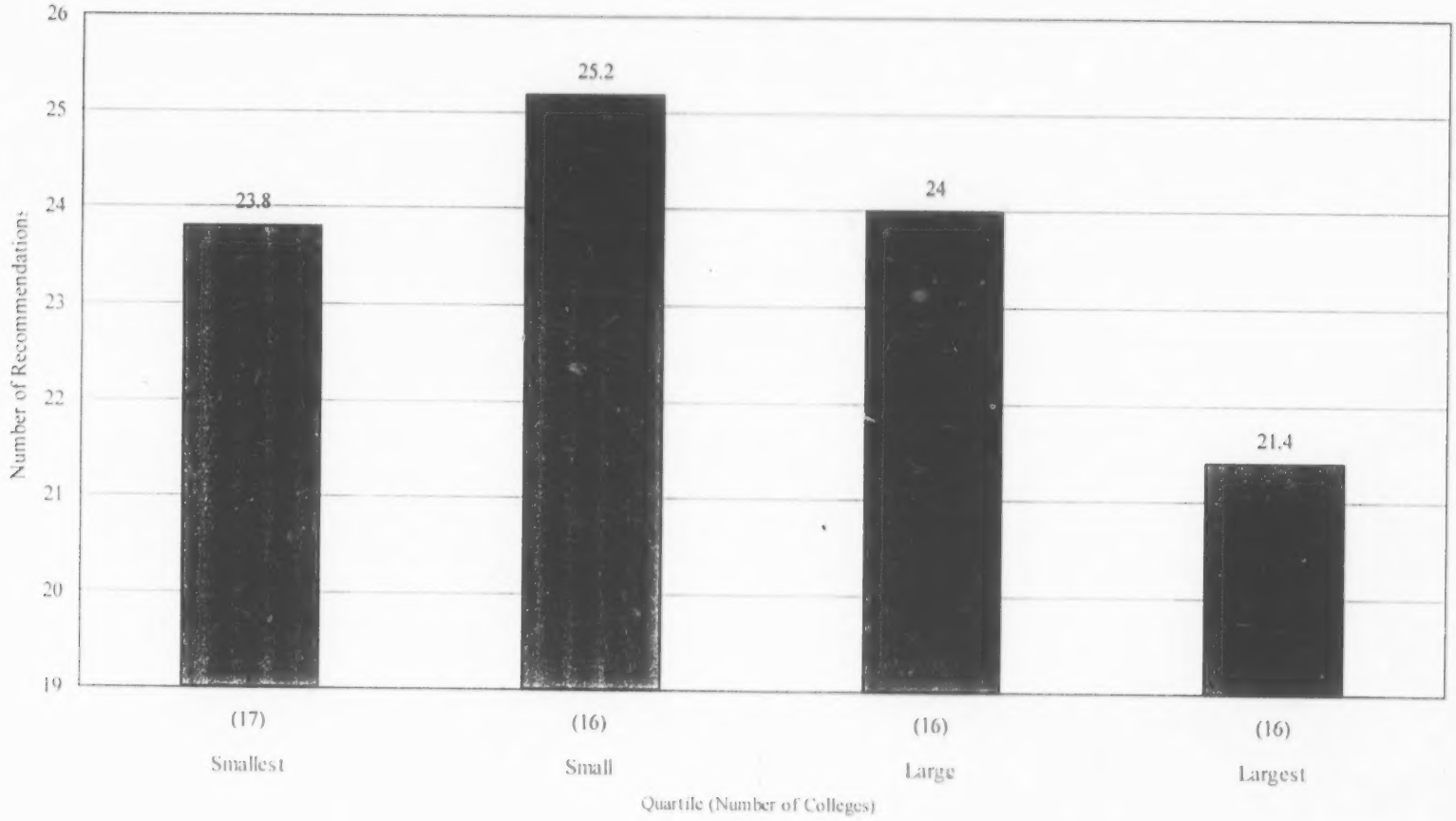

Figure 4.5. Statistical Mean for Each Quartile

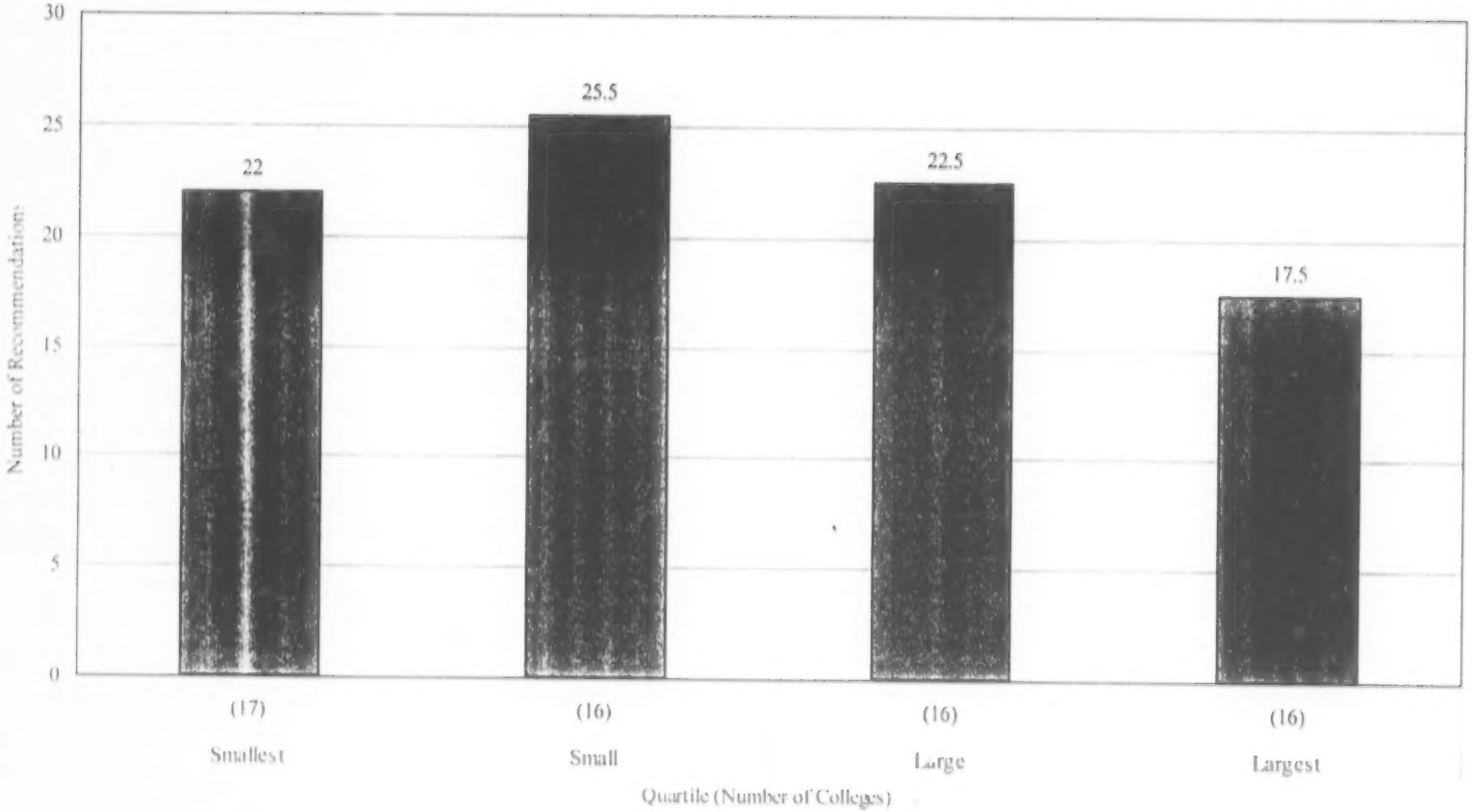

Figure 4.6. Statistical Median for Each Quartile

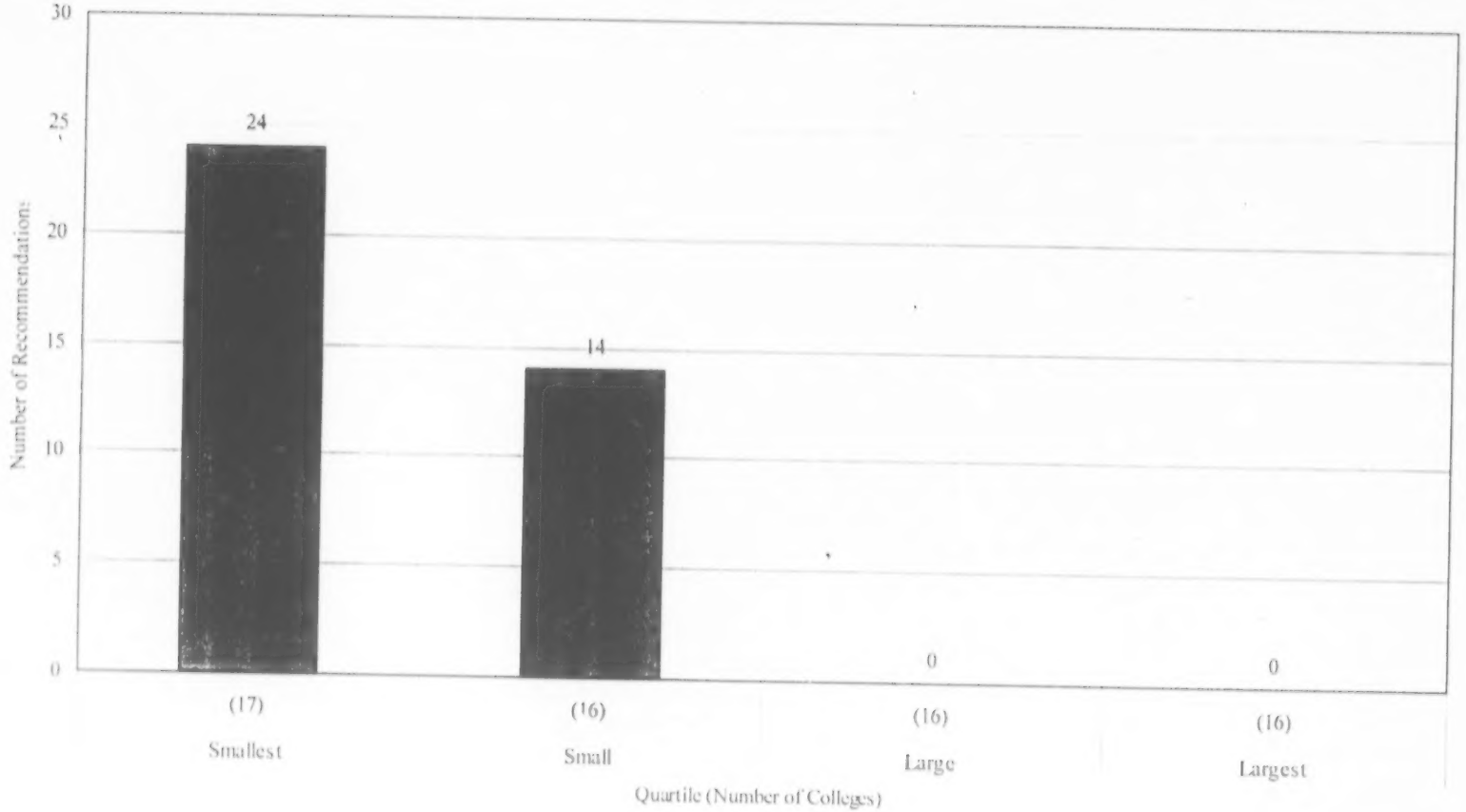

Figure 4.7. Statistical Mode for Each Quartile

in order, beginning with the citation that occurs most often. Information is also included to demonstrate how many institutions received similar citations.

Due to the relatively small numbers of institutions within each quartile, the mode calculation has only marginal utility. The most frequent number of recommendations is obviously greater for the Smallest quartile (24) than for the Small quartile (14). Yet the Large and Largest categories have no distinguishable modes at all.

The mean and median calculations create graphs that are remarkably similar in appearance. The mean and median for the Smallest (23.8/22) and the Large (24/22.5) quartiles are virtually identical. In both calculations, the Small group has higher numbers (25.2/25.5) than the other quartiles, but the Largest group has much lower numbers (21.4/17.5). *The initial results would appear to indicate the possibility of an indirect relationship between enrollment size of an institution and the number of recommendations received.* This indirect relationship would seem to be in effect, however, only after a certain minimum enrollment size has been attained. This apparent relationship would present an excellent opportunity for additional research.

Smallest

Number of recommendations. The range of results for the number of recommendations for this quartile was greater than any other group. The low was seven and the high was 73. As previously mentioned, 73 is the greatest number of recommendations received by any institution. The inclusion of accreditation data from this particular college will obviously skew the mean for this entire quartile. As a result, it

is somewhat surprising that the mean for this quartile (23.8) is considerably lower than the mean for the Small quartile (25.2).

Distribution of recommendations. The distribution of recommendations within this quartile appears in Table 4.13. The distribution appears to be comparable to the overall distribution within the total survey population. Three sections have greater percentages than the overall group, while three sections have lesser percentages. The most notable discrepancies appear to be in Section IV and Section VI. The "Smallest" quartile has 40.7% of its citations in the section entitled "Educational Program," considerably lower than the overall average of 44.5%. At the same time, "Administrative Processes" (21.2%) is somewhat higher than the overall average (19.3%).

Table 4.13

Distribution of Recommendations – Smallest Quartile

Section	Smallest	All Quartiles
I	2.5%	2.7%
II	1.2%	1.8%
III	12.6%	11.5%
IV	40.7%	44.5%
V	21.7%	20.2%
VI	21.2%	19.3%

Note: Range = 7 to 73; Mean = 23.8; Median = 22; Mode = 24.

Most frequent recommendations. The most frequently cited recommendations for institutions within this quartile can be found below. Meeting faculty credential requirements is the predominant problem among all institutions, and the Smallest quartile

is no exception. Only one college in this particular quartile failed to receive a recommendation in this area. The second most-frequent recommendation is a tie between three criteria, all of which are found in Section III, "Institutional Effectiveness."

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (16 of 17) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (10 of 17) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

2. (tie) For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (10 of 17) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

2. (tie) An institution **must** regularly evaluate the effectiveness of its institutional research process and use its findings for the improvement of its process. (10 of 17) (SACS, 1996, p. 22)

This quartile is the only group to include the criterion which deals with the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the institutional research process. Evaluating the institutional research function can be financially and administratively burdensome for many small institutions, since small institutions are typically unable to create an administrative office for these responsibilities. In many cases, they are unable to assign one full-time person to the institutional research function. Among smaller institutions, it is more likely to find an administrator being assigned those responsibilities in addition to

other duties as a means of minimizing expenditures. As a result, institutional research efforts at smaller institutions possibly have less oversight and supervision, thus resulting in more recommendations from SACS.

Summation. Institutions in the Smallest quartile are less likely to encounter problems in academic programming than they are in areas of educational support and administrative processes. It is likely that these support areas are more vulnerable to the financial constraints encountered by the smallest colleges.

Small

Number of recommendations. The range of recommendations received by institutions in this quartile varies from ten to 40. This is the narrowest spread, by far, among the four groups. From high to low, the range for this quartile is 30 compared to 48, 49, and 66 for the other three groups. The narrow range implies less variance within the results of these sixteen institutions.

Even with the narrow range of results for this quartile, this group has the greatest average number of recommendations (25.2). The median of 25.5 is also higher than that of any other quartile. Additionally, it is interesting to note that the mean and median both occur extremely close to the midpoint (25) of the range. Except for the fact that the mode for these institutions is only 14, there appears to be a relatively normal distribution of results with this particular group.

Distribution of recommendations. The distribution of recommendations from this quartile is compared to the entire survey population in Table 4.14. One particular

Table 4.14

Distribution of Recommendations – Small Quartile

Section	Small	All Quartiles
I	2.2%	2.7%
II	2.0%	1.8%
III	13.6%	11.5%
IV	49.1%	44.5%
V	14.6%	20.2%
VI	18.4%	19.3%

Note: Range = 10 to 40; Mean = 25.2; Median = 25.5; Mode = 14.

discrepancy appears to be noteworthy. This quartile has a greater proportion of recommendations in the area of "Educational Program" than any other quartile. In fact, almost 50% of all recommendations for institutions in the Small quartile came from this section of the *Criteria*.

Most frequent recommendations. The most frequently cited criteria within this quartile can be found below. Among the quartiles, this group is unique in the fact that faculty credentials is *not* at the top of the list. Within in this group, institutional effectiveness within administrative and educational support services is the primary weakness found by visiting committees. This particular criterion was cited at all but one college (15 of 16) within this quartile. Although the order may not be the same in every instance, the top four recommendations on this list are identical to the top four recommendations for all institutions participating in this survey.

1. For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals

b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (15 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

2. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (13 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

3. (tie) The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (11 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

3. (tie) It **is the responsibility** of the institution to keep on file for all full-time and part-time faculty members documentation of academic preparation, such as official transcripts and, if appropriate for demonstrating competency, official documentation of professional and work experience, technical and performance competency, records of publications, certifications and other qualifications. (11 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 45)

Summation. Institutions in the Small quartile have the highest number of total recommendations and the least variance of results.

Large

Number of recommendations. The range of recommendations for this particular quartile varies from a low of three to a high of 51. Three recommendations is the lowest number for any college in the survey. One institution in this group shares this distinction with another college in the Largest quartile. The mean (24) and median (22.5) results for these institutions are in both cases second only to the Small quartile in terms of the

number of overall recommendations. These numbers are only slightly higher than the results for the Smallest quartile.

Distribution of recommendations. The distribution of recommendations for this quartile is located in Table 4.15. The distribution among the six sections of the *Criteria* provides some unusual results for this particular quartile. Colleges in this group have 44.5% of their recommendations within Section IV, "Educational Program." That percentage is identical to the result for the overall sample of sixty-five institutions. The results for the other five sections, however, are either the highest or the lowest among each of the quartiles. This group, for example, has the greatest percentage of recommendations in Section I (3.9%) and Section V (25.3%). It also has the lowest percentage of recommendations in Section II (1.0%), Section III (7.8%), and Section VI (17.4%). The argument, therefore, could be made that this group is the least representative of any quartile in terms of the distribution of recommendations.

Table 4.15

Distribution of Recommendations – Large Quartile

Section	Large	All Quartiles
I	3.9%	2.7%
II	1.0%	1.8%
III	7.8%	11.5%
IV	44.5%	44.5%
V	25.3%	20.2%
VI	17.4%	19.3%

Note: Range = 3 to 51; Mean = 24; Median = 22.5; Mode = n/a.

Most frequent recommendations. The most frequent recommendations for this quartile are listed below. By a substantial margin, the recommendation relating to faculty credentials tops the list for schools of this size. In fact, only one institution was *not* cited in this area. The list for this particular quartile is unusual with regards to the notable absence of one criterion. The recommendation which relates to the institutional effectiveness of educational programs is nowhere to be found. Although this criterion is third on the overall list and is present in the top three for each of the other three quartiles, it ranks tenth within this particular group.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (15 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. It **is the responsibility** of the institution to keep on file for all full-time and part-time faculty members documentation of academic preparation, such as official transcripts and, if appropriate for demonstrating competency, official documentation of professional and work experience, technical and performance competency, records of publications, certifications and other qualifications. (10 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 45)

3. (tie) For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (8 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

3. (tie) The institution **must** demonstrate that its graduates of degree programs are competent in reading, writing, oral communication, fundamental mathematical skills and the basic use of computers. (8 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 28)

3. (tie) All aspects of fund raising **must** be incorporated into the planning process and evaluated regularly. (8 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 70)

Summation. Large colleges are less representative of the entire survey population when it comes to the distribution of recommendations within the six sections of the *Criteria*. This quartile does, however, have very favorable results in the area of institutional effectiveness.

Largest

Number of recommendations. The range of recommendations received by colleges in this quartile varies from a low of three to a high of 52. Three recommendations is the lowest number received by any institution in the survey, and fifty-two is second to only one other college. The result is a considerable variance (49) in the number of recommendations throughout this quartile.

Distribution of recommendations. The distribution of recommendations within the six sections of the *Criteria* provides a compelling argument that this quartile is the most representative of the overall survey population. Table 4.16 shows the distribution

Table 4.16

Distribution of Recommendations – Largest Quartile

Section	Largest	All Quartiles
I	2.3%	2.7%
II	2.9%	1.8%
III	11.7%	11.5%
IV	43.4%	44.5%
V	19.2%	20.2%
VI	20.4%	19.3%

Note: Range = 3 to 52; Mean = 21.4; Median = 17.5; Mode = n/a.

of recommendations within this quartile. While this group does have the highest percentage of recommendations (2.9%) of any quartile in Section II, "Institutional Purpose," the results for the other five sections are neither the highest nor the lowest percentages. This means that the percentage distribution is quite similar to that of the overall population.

Most frequent recommendations. The most frequent recommendations, as listed below, appear to be representative of the overall survey population. The specific criteria cited most often deal with faculty credentials and institutional effectiveness.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (11 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (10 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

3. The institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education
   b. formulate educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved
   d. use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services and operations. (9 of 16) (SACS, 1996, p. 20)

While the distribution of recommendations and the specific recommendations tend to reflect the overall population, there is a substantial difference in the overall

number of recommendations received by institutions within this quartile. The mean (21.4) and median (17.5) are considerably lower for this particular group.

Summation. While the Largest institutions appear to reflect the overall population with regard to both the types of recommendations received and the specific criteria cited, the colleges in this quartile have received significantly fewer total numbers of recommendations.

This author believes that additional research is needed regarding any possible correlation between institution size and the number of recommendations received from visiting committees. It is possible that greater resources available to the largest institutions allow these colleges to achieve greater compliance in all sections of the *Criteria.*

Results Organized by Governance Structure

The vast majority of Level I institutions in the South are public institutions. This is reflected in the governance structure of the 67 institutions that were eligible for participation in this study. Only six of the 67 colleges are private. The remaining 61 are public. This portion of the study has been adversely effected by the two institutions that chose not to participate. Both of these colleges are private. As a result, only four of the 65 colleges included in the survey population are private institutions.

Public

Since public colleges make up the vast majority of institutions in this survey, the results for public institutions are virtually identical to the overall results. Rather than focus on specific results for public institutions, this report will focus instead on the

private colleges and the areas that show distinct differences between the private sector and the overall results. A summary of the number and distribution of recommendations for public institutions, however, can be found in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17

Distribution of Recommendations – Public Institutions

Section	Public Institutions	All Institutions
I	2.6%	2.7%
II	1.7%	1.8%
III	11.5%	11.5%
IV	45.3%	44.5%
V	20.0%	20.2%
VI	18.9%	19.3%

Note: Range = 3 to 52; Mean = 22.7; Median = 21.5; Mode = 19.

Private

Number of recommendations. The range of recommendations for private institutions ranges from a low of 22 to a high of 73. Both of these figures are substantially higher than the range for public institutions, which is three and 52. The mean, median, and mode for public and private institutions are included in Figures 4.8 through 4.10. Based upon the wide disparity of ranges between public and private schools, it is not surprising to find similar disparities among the means, medians, and modes. It is particularly noteworthy that the mean number of recommendations for public institutions (22.7) is only slightly higher than the low end of the range of distribution for private institutions (22).

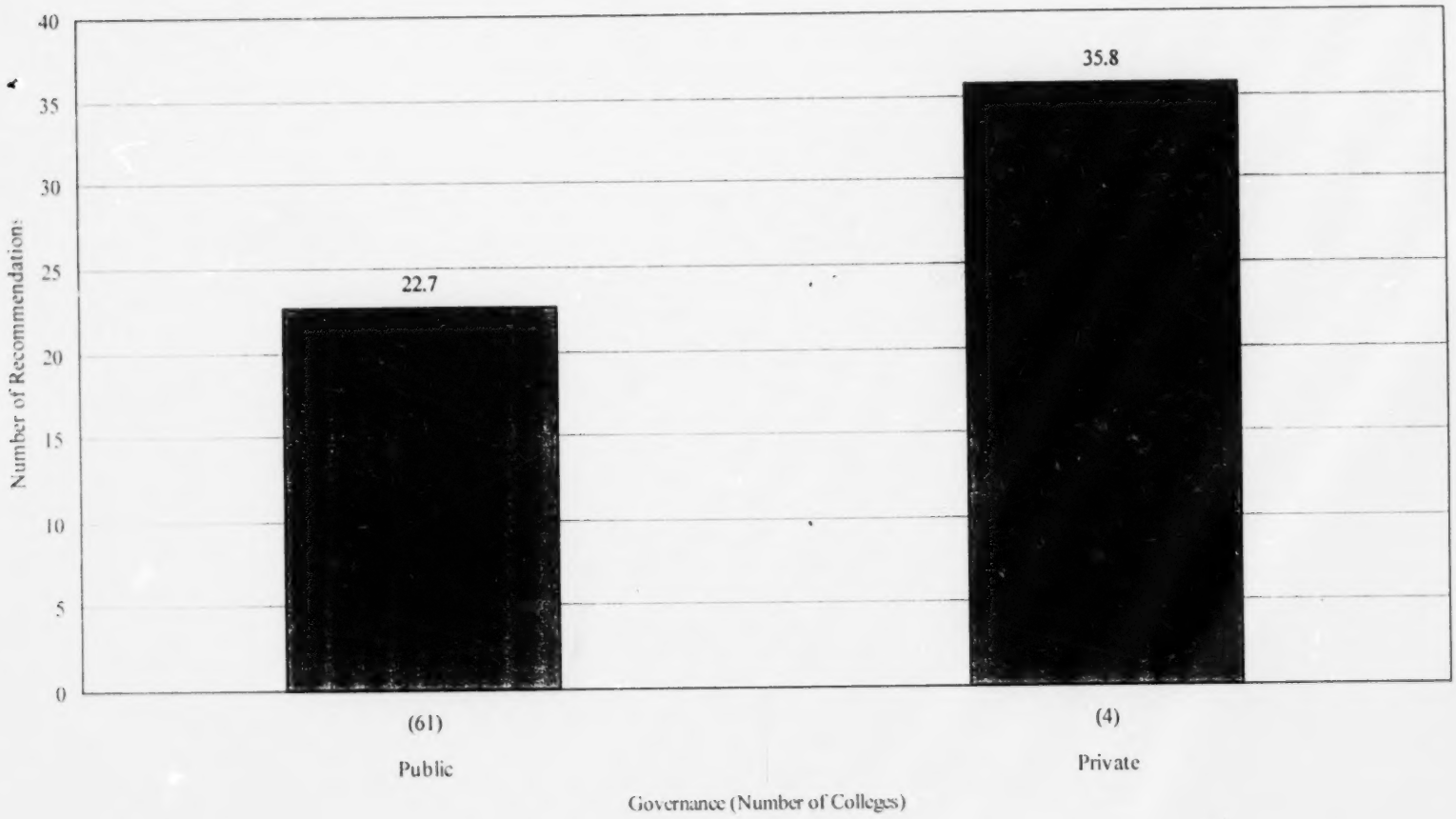

Figure 4.8. Statistical Mean for Each Governance Structure

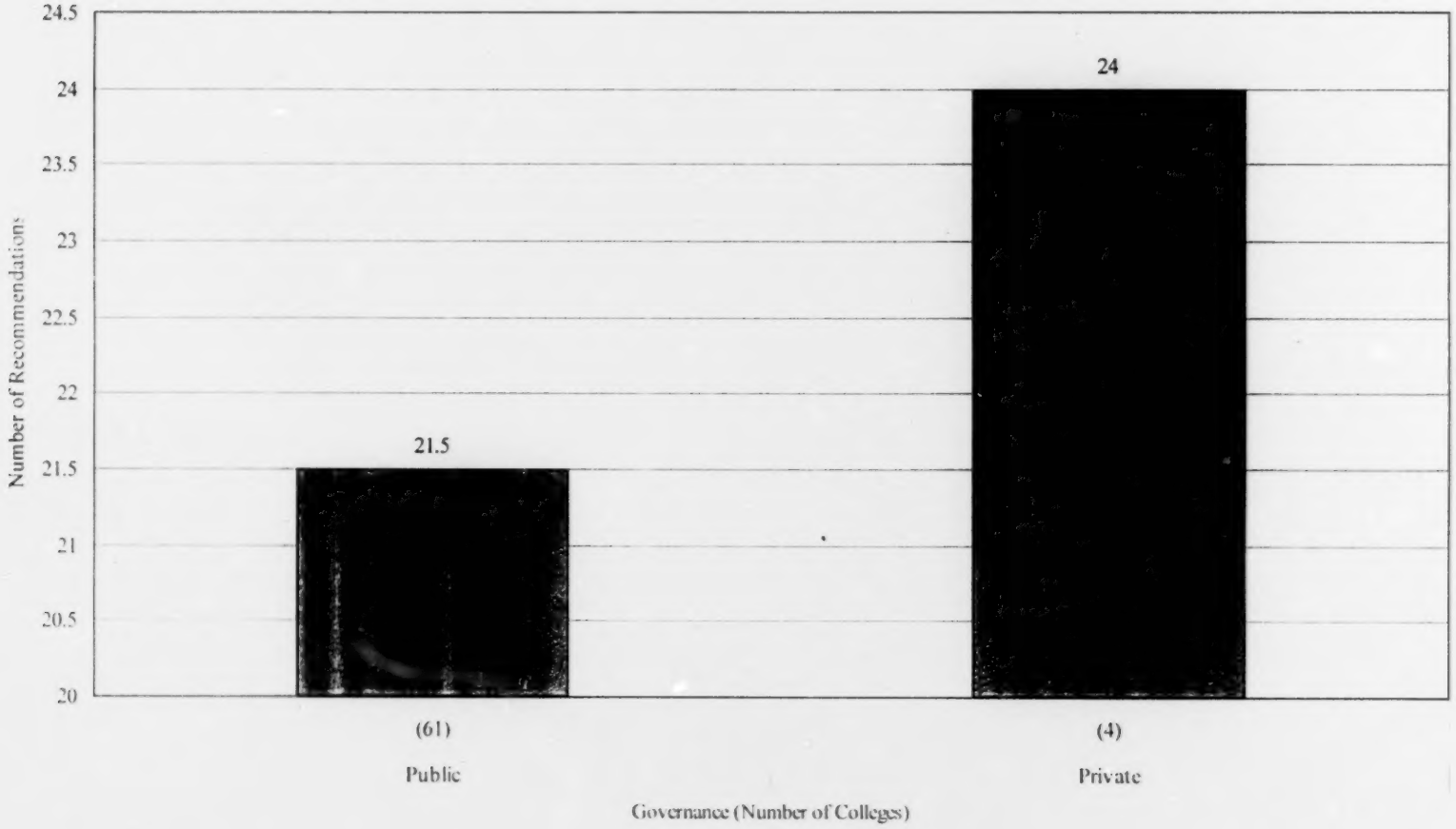

Figure 4.9. Statistical Median for Each Governance Structure

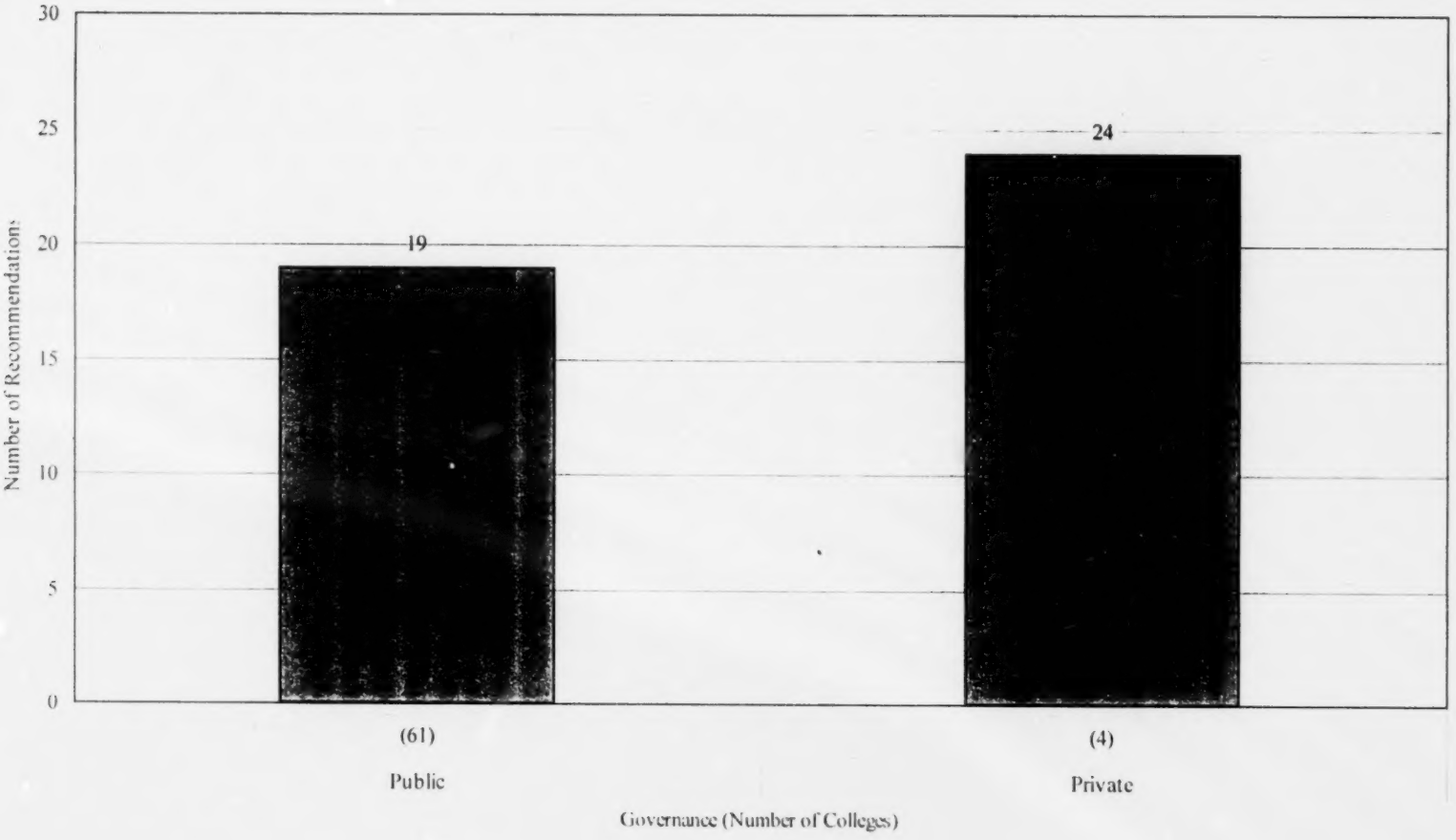

Figure 4.10. Statistical Mode for Each Governance Structure

Distribution of recommendations. Tables 4.17 and 4.18 outline the distribution of recommendations within the six sections of the *Criteria* for public and private institutions. The private colleges have significant differences when compared to their public counterparts. The most notable example appears in Section IV, "Educational Program." The 37.1% figure for private colleges is substantially lower than the overall number of 44.5%. Since the percentage of recommendations received by private institutions in this particular area is lower, it stands to reason that these schools are receiving a greater percentage of recommendations in other areas. The greatest differences when compared to public colleges appear to be in Section I (4.2%) and Section VI (23.8%). Private institutions also have somewhat greater percentages of recommendations in Sections II (2.1%) and V (21.7%).

Table 4.18

Distribution of Recommendations – Private Institutions

Section	Private Institutions	All Institutions
I	4.2%	2.7%
II	2.1%	1.8%
III	11.2%	11.5%
IV	37.1%	44.5%
V	21.7%	20.2%
VI	23.8%	19.3%

Note: Range = 22 to 73; Mean = 35.8; Median = 24; Mode = 24.

Most frequent recommendations. The list of most frequently cited criteria for public institutions is, once again, remarkably similar to that of the overall population. In fact, for the four most frequent recommendations, the lists are identical. At first glance,

the list for private colleges appears similar as well. The first two recommendations are the same on each list: faculty credentials and institutional effectiveness for administrative and educational support services. The remainder of the list for private colleges, however, is quite different from the public sector. The most frequently listed recommendations for private institutions are found below. The last two criteria are unique to the private sector listing. In fact, these two criteria do not appear on the lists for any individual state or any quartile. The two "must" statements relate to faculty compensation and the training of faculty and staff in the use of information technology resources.

1. In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree. (4 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 44)

2. (tie) For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must**
   a. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals
   b. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit
   c. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit
   d. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services. (3 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 21)

2. (tie) Salary increases **must** be based on clearly stated criteria. (3 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 51)

2. (tie) There **must** be provisions for ongoing training of faculty and staff members so that they may make skillful use of appropriate application software. (3 of 4) (SACS, 1996, p. 61)

Summation. While results for private institutions suffer from the limited number of participating colleges (4), private institutions appear to be more likely than their public counterparts to have high numbers of recommendations. The private colleges are also

more likely to have a greater proportion of citations in academic support services as compared to educational program areas.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary

This chapter is organized into three distinct sections. The first section provides details related to the findings of the research project. These findings are part of an overall synopsis of the entire research effort, beginning with the original purpose and ending with the final results. The second segment focuses on conclusions. The conclusions relate not only to the original research question, but also to additional concerns that were raised by the results of the study. Finally, the third section includes recommendations for future research, as well as recommendations for administrative practice.

Findings

The purpose of this research as stated in Chapter One was to determine if there were particular recommendations that appear repeatedly in visiting team reports to community colleges. Since reaffirmation of accreditation is an extremely costly and time-consuming process, institutions would stand to benefit from information regarding problem areas within the *Criteria for Accreditation.*

After conducting extensive research of the literature concerning regional accreditation, the author found a knowledge void in the area of specific site visit recommendations. This void was most likely the result of access restrictions to site visit reports due to privacy laws. Privacy concerns, for instance, led to less than total participation on the part of eligible institutions within the survey sample. Two private

colleges declined the invitation to be included in the study, thus lowering by one-third the number of private institutions to be incorporated in the final results.

A concerted effort has been made in this study to go beyond the mere collection of overall results and to look at the impact of recommendations on various segments of the total survey population. As a result, the findings below are not only summarized for the overall results, but also by state, by size, and by governance type.

Overall Findings

The primary focus of this research effort has been effectively summarized in the title of this report: "The Specific Criteria Cited Most Often by Visiting Committees to Level I Institutions." One specific criterion does indeed stand out from the overall survey results as *the* recommendation cited most often. This distinction is held by Recommendation #186 which deals with faculty credentials. The exact wording of the "must" statement is as follows:

> "In an associate degree program, full-time and part-time faculty members teaching credit courses in the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics **must** have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and hold at least a master's degree, or hold the minimum of a master's degree with a major in the teaching discipline" (SACS, 1998, p. 44).

This particular recommendation was received by almost 85% of the colleges participating in the survey, placing it well ahead of the second-most frequent recommendation at 66%. Not only did this citation place first overall, but it also ranked first in all but one state (Texas) and first in all but one quartile (Small).

A summary of the ten recommendations cited most often appears in Table 5.1. The "must" statements are listed in order of frequency, beginning with the

Table 5.1

The Ten Most Frequently Cited Recommendations – All Institutions

1. Educational Program: Faculty: Academic and Professional Preparation: Associate – This criterion deals with appropriate **faculty credentials** and was cited at 55 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

2. Institutional Effectiveness: Planning and Evaluation – Administrative and Educational Support Services – This criterion deals with **the institutional effectiveness of administrative and educational support services** and was cited at 43 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

3. Institutional Effectiveness: Planning and Evaluation – Educational Programs – This criterion deals with the **institutional effectiveness of educational programs** and was cited at 35 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

4. Educational Program: Faculty: Academic and Professional Preparation: Associate – This criterion deals with appropriate **documentation of faculty credentials** and was cited at 32 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

5. (tie) Educational Program: Undergraduate Program: Undergraduate Completion Requirements – This criterion deals with **graduate competencies in basic skills** areas and was cited at 26 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

5. (tie) Administrative Processes: Financial Resources: Budget Planning – This criterion deals with the **evaluation of budget planning procedures** and was cited at 26 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

7. (tie) Educational Program: Distance Learning Programs – This criterion deals with ensuring the **effectiveness of distance learning programs** and was cited at 25 of the 65 institutions.

7. (tie) Administrative Processes: Physical Resources: Safety and Security – This criterion deals with the existence of a **comprehensive safety plan** and was cited at 25 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

9. Administrative Processes: Institutional Advancement: Fund Raising – This criterion deals with the **planning and evaluation of fund raising activities** and was cited at 24 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

10. Educational Program: Faculty: Criteria and Procedures for Evaluation – This criterion deals with the **use of faculty evaluations** and was cited at 23 of the 65 institutions in the survey.

recommendation that appears on the most visiting committee reports. Each listing includes the section of the report where the recommendation is located, the exact wording of the criterion, and the number of institutions that received citations for that specific "must" statement.

An effort has been made in this report to focus on generalities, as well as specifics. While faculty credentials is *the* specific criterion cited most often, another section of the *Criteria* appears to provide a disproportionate number of recommendations. This area of concern is Section III, "Institutional Effectiveness."

The second and third most-often cited criteria both come from Section III. The two "must" statements deal with the planning and evaluation of both educational programs and administrative support services. The overall impact of this section on visiting committee reports is most apparent, however, when comparing the percentage of criteria in Section III with the number of recommendations given in that same area. "Institutional Effectiveness" contains only twelve specific statements, roughly 3% of the *Criteria.* Yet these twelve statements elicited 176 recommendations at the 65 colleges included in this survey. The result is that almost 12% of all recommendations come from this section – a figure four times greater than the 3% represented by the actual number of "must" statements.

Findings by State

The previous chapter provided discussion of some differences in results from state to state across the jurisdiction of the Southern Association. For the most part, the same three criteria appeared at the top of the results for each state – faculty credentials, planning and evaluation of educational programs, and planning and evaluation of

administrative support services. One of the most interesting aspects of the state-by-state comparisons dealt with the overall number of recommendations received by institutions in each state.

It has never been the author's intent to use the results of this study to provide a ranking of state performance, i.e., *U. S. News and World Report's* "Best Colleges" or *Money's* "Best Places to Live." The mean numbers of recommendations, however, do provide some measure of comparison for state performance. According to the survey results, institutions in South Carolina (15) and North Carolina (19.3) received the fewest recommendations, while those in Georgia (29.2) and Texas (28.7) received the most.

Caution should be advised in placing tremendous emphasis on these results. The size of the sample for some states is quite small, in some cases as few as three colleges. Such a small sample can create a population that is a poor indicator of performance of all institutions within any given state. Both Kentucky and Louisiana were kept out of the state rankings precisely because only one (Kentucky) or two (Louisiana) colleges were included in the survey population.

Findings by Enrollment Size (Quartile)

When the survey population is divided into quartiles, an interesting pattern appears to emerge for both the mean and median numbers of recommendations. The pattern has been graphically represented in the previous chapter in Figures 4.5 and 4.6. The figures show a rise in the mean and median figures from the Smallest to Small quartile. The Small quartile has the highest result for both mean and median figures. The statistical measures then diminish for the Large quartile and are, in fact, lowest for the Largest quartile. While there appears to be an inverse relationship between the number

of recommendations and the size of the institution, the relationship does not seem to hold true for the smallest institutions in the survey.

Findings by Governance Structure

There appear to be some noteworthy discrepancies between the statistical results of public institutions and their private counterparts. The most significant difference appears to be the total number of recommendations. The mean number of recommendations for private colleges (35.8) is more than 50% greater than the mean for public institutions (22.7). In addition, the median and mode are also noticeably larger for private colleges.

When compared to public institutions, private colleges appear to have proportionally fewer recommendations in the area of Educational Programs (Section IV), but more recommendations within Administrative Processes (Section VI). One can surmise that the problems in Administrative Processes are possibly the result of financial uncertainties that typically plague small, private institutions.

Once again, caution must be advised in placing significant emphasis on the results for private institutions. Only four private colleges are included in the survey results, compared to sixty-one public institutions.

Three of the four private colleges are coincidentally three of the smallest institutions in the survey sample. In fact, of the schools with the four lowest FTE enrollments, three are private colleges. This might lead one to question whether results for this group are truly the result of governance or possibly the result of enrollment size.

Conclusions

Primary Conclusions

The initial conclusion to be made from this study focuses on the initial research question. The results of this research indicate that faculty credentials and planning and evaluation are the areas within the *Criteria for Accreditation* that result in the most recommendations from site visit committees.

Assurance of proper faculty credentials is vital to the integrity of all institutions of higher education. Level I institutions, however, face some unique challenges in attempting to comply with this particular criterion. The typical community college offers academic transfer courses, remedial courses, and vocational/occupational courses in an attempt to serve the entire community. Each of these three types of courses has a different set of qualifications within the *Criteria* for instructors. A quick summary of the differences would find transfer courses requiring instructors to have a master's degree, remedial courses requiring a bachelor's degree, and vocational courses requiring a certificate. Different qualifications for different instructors can often be confusing. Adding to the confusion is the difficulty in identifying the difference between an academic transfer course and a vocational course at some institutions. Such confusion can lead to non-compliance with this criterion.

It is not unusual for community colleges to have well over one hundred faculty members on staff at any given time. Not only do full-time personnel have to meet this standard, but all adjunct faculty as well. If an institution has one instructor out of compliance in terms of appropriate credentials, the college will receive a recommendation.

Many colleges in remote, rural locations have difficulty attracting appropriately credentialed faculty members. In order to salvage a course, or possibly an entire degree program, many institutions find it necessary to assign responsibility to faculty members with credentials in a related field. Such temporary arrangements often continue for extended periods of time and result in recommendations when visiting teams arrive on campus.

Planning and evaluation recommendations fall under the umbrella of "Institutional Effectiveness." Though small in the overall number of "must" statements, this section of the *Criteria* has resulted in a disproportionate number of recommendations for Level I institutions.

When added to the accreditation guidelines in the mid-1980s, institutional effectiveness criteria were a foreign concept to many professionals in higher education. The new criteria were an effort on the part of SACS to move the accreditation process beyond counting books in the library and Bunsen burners in the laboratories. Institutional effectiveness was an effort by accrediting bodies to hold colleges accountable to their constituencies by having them document successes toward the achievement of their individual institutional missions. After almost fifteen years, Level I institutions are still having difficulty meeting these standards.

Secondary Conclusions

The collection of data has led to two additional conclusions that were not part of the original research question. The first of the conclusions deals with the possibility of an excessive number of "must" statements, and the second deals with discrepancies in the application of certain segments of the *Criteria* by visiting committees.

Many individuals may argue that over 400 "must" statements appear to be an excessive number of criteria. These persons may be empowered by results showing 140 statements not being cited in *any* visiting committee report. If one adds this figure to the number of statements that were cited only once, the result would be over half of the criteria (206) appearing as recommendations one time or less. These findings give reason for some persons to question the necessity of some of the criteria.

One conclusion is undeniable. There are numerous examples of duplication among the criteria. The best examples of duplication are found in the "Conditions of Eligibility" of Section I. Recommendation #44, for instance, says:

> "The credit hours **must** be drawn from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural sciences/mathematics" (SACS, 1996, p. 11).

The same requirement is found in Section IV when Recommendation #122 says:

> "The core **must** include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural sciences/mathematics" (SACS, 1996, p. 28).

Another example of duplication exists with Recommendations #46 and #134. The former states:

> "In each major in a degree program, there **must** be at least one full-time faculty member with responsibility for supervision and coordination of the major" (SACS, 1996, p. 11).

The latter says:

> "At least one full-time faculty member with appropriate credentials, as defined in Section 4.8.2, **must** have primary teaching assignment in the major" (SACS, 1996, p. 29).

These examples appear to justify claims that there are an excessive number of criteria and many could be combined or eliminated.

These findings lead directly to a second conclusion that can be drawn from the research: There is a tremendous amount of subjectivity in the application of the *Criteria* by visiting committee teams. The previous examples of duplication provide evidence of such a lack of consistency. In the first example dealing with core curriculum requirements, only five institutions received citations for Recommendation #44, yet twenty-one received recommendations for #122. The two statements say precisely the same thing, yet one is cited four times more often than the other. In the second example, only three recommendations were given for #46, yet ten colleges were cited for Recommendation #134. Again, identical statements; yet a vast discrepancy in the application of the *Criteria* by the visiting committees.

These examples illustrate a problem in comparing the results of visiting committee reports. While all visiting committees are commissioned to apply the *Criteria* in an equitable manner, each visiting committee assumes its own persona. Each group is a unique collection of individuals, with each individual bringing his or her own set of experiences and backgrounds to the committee. Despite the best efforts of those responsible for writing the *Criteria for Accreditation*, there is a tremendous amount of subjectivity in many of the "must" statements. As long as visiting committees are populated by peers rather than professional accreditors, there will continue to be discrepancies in the application of the *Criteria*.

Recommendations

This study has attempted to provide useful input into the accreditation process for practitioners and accrediting bodies alike. While the findings and conclusions may provide valuable additions to the knowledge base, they also raise additional questions

that may provide opportunities for additional research. Three specific opportunities are listed below.

What is the impact of size on the number of recommendations received by an institution?

The initial findings of this report seem to show some correlation between the size of an institution and the number of recommendations that it receives. The relationship is an inverse relationship, meaning the larger the institution, the smaller the number of recommendations. This correlation seems to hold for institutions once a certain level of enrollment is attained. Statistical analysis could be conducted to determine the degree of correlation and also the point, in terms of enrollment, where the inverse relationship appears to begin.

How do Level I institutions compare with other levels of institutions?

Community colleges obviously have different missions from the traditional four-year, baccalaureate-granting institutions. Research universities have further differences. A tremendous research opportunity is available to compare the results of Level I institutions with other types of institutions. Comparisons could be made to find which sections of the *Criteria* appear to cause the greatest problems for each type of institution. Consideration would have to be made for minor differences in the *Criteria* that are applicable for different levels of institutions. These differences, however, are primarily limited to Section IV, "Educational Program."

What impact does the level of autonomy within the states have on the number of recommendations?

Many studies have been conducted attempting to measure the degree of autonomy present among Level I institutions within individual states. Some states, such as Texas, have a long tradition of autonomy among their community colleges. The colleges have a tremendous amount of freedom in setting policies and conducting business with minimal oversight by a central coordinating board. Other states, however, have centralized systems with strong state control. North Carolina and Virginia are examples of states that maintain a considerable degree of oversight and control of their community colleges through a centralized state organization. While each type of organizational control has its benefits, the potential research being discussed here would attempt to compare the performance of institutions in various states to see if the degree of autonomy has any noticeable impact on the number of recommendations received.

In conclusion, the results of this study may have practical implications for practitioners, as well as regional accreditation bodies. Institutional administrators now have access to specific criteria that have recently caused problems for their sister institutions within the jurisdiction of SACS. These problem areas should serve as warnings for administrators and allow adjustments to be made prior to the next accreditation site visit. Self-study directors may choose to place a greater emphasis on these problem areas and lesser emphasis on those areas that are seldom cited by visiting committees.

Finally, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has data that can be used to assist member institutions. It also has data that can be used to improve the accreditation process itself. Duplication of criteria and disparate application of those

criteria by visiting committees are two problem areas that can possibly be addressed in the near future.

Continuing Developments

As this report is being written, major changes in the accreditation process are being proposed by the Commission on Colleges of SACS. An attempt is being made to both reduce the number of "must" statements and make the *Criteria* less prescriptive. During September of 2000, a formal proposal entitled, "Principles and Requirements for Accreditation" was submitted to all member institutions in the Commission on Colleges. The new proposal calls for six distinct elements of accreditation:

1. The Institutional Prospectus for Improvement;
2. Principles on Integrity and Commitment;
3. Core Requirements for Candidacy and for Membership;
4. Comprehensive Requirements;
5. Additional Requirements for Institutions Participating in Title IV Programs; and
6. The External Review by Peers.

The new plan alters the accreditation process in many ways. The most notable feature is the streamlining of over four hundred "must" statements into approximately sixty requirements. The core and comprehensive requirements establish requisites for accreditation in three areas:

1. Mission, Governance, and Institutional Effectiveness;
2. Programs; and
3. Resources.

The proposed changes are the first significant change in the accreditation process since the initial approval of the *Criteria for Accreditation* in 1984. According to SACS officials involved in the development of the new accreditation process, the primary goal of the proposed change is to institute "a process that provides institutions with greater flexibility along with increased responsibility." (Franklin, 2000) Some of the anticipated benefits for members institutions are:

1. fewer accreditation requirements;
2. greater flexibility for demonstrating compliance;
3. greater potential for cost and time benefits;
4. greater efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency in the external review process; and
5. greater opportunity to focus on critical issues pertaining to quality improvement.

Commission on Colleges members have been apprised of the new proposal and feedback has been obtained through six regional meetings during October of 2000. The proposal is to be voted on by the full membership at the Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia during December of 2001. If approved, the new guidelines would be effective for institutions receiving accreditation site visits beginning in the Fall of 2004.

While the specifics of the accreditation process may change and evolve, the need for accreditation will remain constant. Institutions will continue to find it necessary to document their successes in the eyes of their many constituencies – the government, the public, their students, and their peers.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table A.1

Roster of Level I Institutions Receiving Site Visits (1996-1999)

College Name	FTE	Public/ Private	State	Date of Visit	Participating
Beaufort County	1373	Public	NC	1998	Yes
Bevill State	3233	Public	AL	1999	Yes
Blue Ridge	1595	Public	NC	1998	Yes
Bossier Parish	3160	Public	LA	1998	Yes
Brunswick	1022	Public	NC	1998	Yes
Carteret	1162	Public	NC	1999	Yes
Central Carolina	3953	Public	NC	1997	Yes
Chesterfield-Marlboro Tech.	878	Public	SC	1998	Yes
Chipola	2121	Public	FL	1998	Yes
Cisco	1984	Public	TX	1999	Yes
Coastal Carolina	4077	Public	NC	1997	Yes
Eastern Shore	516	Public	VA	1998	Yes
Edgecombe	1875	Public	NC	1998	Yes
Floyd	2519	Public	GA	1997	Yes
Frank Phillips	1142	Public	TX	1999	Yes
G. C. Wallace State	1411	Public	AL	1999	Yes
Germanna	1695	Public	VA	1997	Yes
Gwinnett Technical	2778	Public	GA	1997	Yes
Haywood	1292	Public	NC	1998	Yes
Horry-Georgetown Technical	3074	Public	SC	1998	Yes
Itawamba	2729	Public	MS	1998	Yes
J. Sargent Reynolds	5953	Public	VA	1999	Yes
Jacksonville	299	Private	TX	1999	Yes
James Sprunt	1148	Public	NC	1998	Yes
Jefferson Davis	1271	Public	AL	1999	Yes
Jones County	4140	Public	MS	1997	Yes

College Name	FTE	Public/ Private	State	Date of Visit	Participating
Keiser	1895	Private	FL	1997	Yes
Kilgore	3250	Public	TX	1999	Yes
Laredo	6138	Public	TX	1999	Yes
Lord Fairfax	2066	Public	VA	1997	Yes
Lurleen B. Wallace	857	Public	AL	1997	Yes
Martin	964	Public	NC	1998	Yes
Mary Holmes	444	Private	MS	1998	No
Middle Georgia	2154	Public	GA	1999	Yes
Midlands Technical	8090	Public	SC	1999	Yes
Mississippi Delta	3488	Public	MS	1997	Yes
Mississippi Gulf Coast	9683	Public	MS	1999	Yes
Mitchell	1710	Public	NC	1997	Yes
Mountain Empire	1929	Public	VA	1999	Yes
Nashville State Technical	3892	Public	TN	1998	Yes
New River	2318	Public	VA	1997	Yes
Northwest Mississippi	4822	Public	MS	1997	Yes
Northwest Shoals	2638	Public	AL	1999	Yes
Nunez	1408	Public	LA	1997	Yes
Pasco-Hernando	3539	Public	FL	1999	Yes
Patrick Henry	1592	Public	VA	1997	Yes
Paul D. Camp	789	Public	VA	1998	Yes
Pensacola	21705	Public	FL	1997	Yes
Piedmont Technical	2715	Public	SC	1997	Yes
Piedmont Virginia	2204	Public	VA	1999	Yes
Randolph	2053	Public	NC	1999	Yes
Rappahannock	1708	Public	VA	1998	Yes
Richard Bland	934	Public	VA	1998	Yes
Saint Catharine	267	Private	KY	1998	Yes
San Jacinto	14807	Public	TX	1999	Yes
Savannah Technical	1430	Public	GA	1997	Yes
Shelton State	3687	Public	AL	1999	Yes
South Georgia	1030	Public	GA	1997	Yes

College Name	FTE	Public/ Private	State	Date of Visit	Participating
Southside Virginia	1839	Public	VA	1997	Yes
Spartanburg Methodist	665	Private	SC	1998	Yes
Vernon Regional	1677	Public	TX	1999	Yes
Virginia Highlands	1330	Public	VA	1997	Yes
Volunteer State	4766	Public	TN	1999	Yes
Walters State	4186	Public	TN	1998	Yes
Western Texas	744	Public	TX	1998	Yes
Wharton County	3432	Public	TX	1998	Yes
Wood College	190	Private	MS	1999	No

APPENDIX B

Letter of Request

April 1, 1999

«Name», «Title»
«InstitutionName»
«Address1»
«Address2»

Dear «Salutation»:

My name is Van Miller. I am the Director of Admissions at Texarkana College in Texarkana, Texas. I am also a doctoral student at Baylor University pursuing a degree in Educational Administration. In partial fulfillment of doctoral requirements I have selected the topic of accreditation for my dissertation.

As Self-Study Director for my own institution four years ago, I fully understand the extensive amounts of time and effort involved in the preparation for an accreditation team visit. For my dissertation I propose to document the specific criteria for which schools are most often cited by visiting committees. It is my hope to collect this information by consolidating the results of the visiting committee reports of all Level I institutions in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools that had accreditation visits between the Fall of 1996 and the Spring of 1999. In order to access this data from the Southern Association headquarters, however, I must receive a release from each individual school. That is the reason for this correspondence.

I would respectfully request that you allow me to include your institution's data in this report by signing the release at the bottom of this page and returning it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Please rest assured that no individual institutional data will be released in this proposed report. All data will be in aggregate form combined with the 60 to 70 other institutions which meet the above-mentioned criteria. If you have any reservations or questions I would invite you to call myself at (903) 838-4541, my dissertation advisor at Baylor University, Dr. Robert C. Cloud at (254) 710-3505, or Ms. Carol Luthman of SACS at (404) 679-4501.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Van Miller

APPENDIX C

Permission Form

Van Miller, doctoral student at Baylor University, has permission to access the «DateofVisit» SACS Visiting Committee Report of «InstitutionName».

Sign: _____ Date: _____

«Name»

APPENDIX D

Letter of Endorsement from Dr. James T. Rogers

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
COMMISSION ON COLLEGES
1866 Southern Lane • Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097
Telephone 404/679-4500 Fax 404/679-4558

October 5, 1999

MEMORANDUM

TO: Selected Member Institutions of the Commission on Colleges

FROM: James T. Rogers, Executive Director, Commission on Colleges

RE: *Doctoral Work of Van Miller*

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has received a request from Mr. Van Miller to use reaffirmation reports of Level I institutions as part of his doctoral research. In order for him to gain access to these reports, he must have permission from the institutions he wishes to study. The Commission on Colleges thinks his research is worthwhile and we support him in this endeavor.

We have received assurances from Mr. Miller that no data specific to an individual institution will be released in the final report. All data will be aggregated with other institutions to protect the privacy of individual participants and their institutions.

Mr. Miller has also agreed to share the results of his study with the Commission. He has offered to report results to interested parties at a future Annual Meeting. It is our opinion that institutions at various stages in the self-study process could be interested in the findings of this project.

The Commission on Colleges encourages your participation in this project by releasing your institution's data to be included in the research project.

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